METRO / A17

1 killed, 3 hurt in MMDA clearing operations in Baclaran Muslim community

WORLD / A20

Exultant Democrats take control of Congress, elect first woman speaker

BUSINESS / B1

Forex reserves hit all-time high of $23B boosted by OFW inflows

NEWS / A2

Bomb explodes near restaurant in Cotabato City, three injured

Bishops give scathing review to best picture

SA MADALING SALITA : YUUUCK!

By Christian V. Esguerra and Bayani San Diego Jr.

BRAINLESS... BAD TASTE... morally disturbing.

It's not a catchy tagline for a movie. It's a review of "Enteng Kabisote 3," top earner and chosen best pic-

BISHOPS/ A8

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Saturday, January 6, 2007 ★★ 6 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 29 P18 website: inquirer.net

Palace now dead set to kill VFA commission

By TJ Burgonio

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO IS NOW dead set on abolishing the Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA-Com) immediately after its executive director assailed Malacañang's handing over to the US Embassy custody of convicted rapist US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, according to adminis-

PALACE NOW/ A6

US balks at VFA review

Revisiting RP-US accord premature, says embassy

By TJ Burgonio and Volt Contreras

MALACAÑANG MAY HAVE ANNOUNCED ITS "RESOLVE" to review the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement as a result of what it called "good lessons" learned from the Subic rape case, but the US Embassy yesterday signaled reluctance to agree to such an endeavor in the foreseeable future.

"We think that [a review] is premature due to the current case still pending in the Philippine judicial system," embassy spokesperson Matthew Lussenhop said in an apparent reference to the appeal of convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith of the US Marines.

At any rate, the embassy has yet to receive a formal communication from the Philippine government regarding a proposed review of the agreement, Lussenhop said.

"No dialogue or renegotiation is taking place," he stressed.

But he added: "We do consult [with Philippine counterparts] regularly and often regarding the interpretation and implementation of the VFA."

Asked what the embassy would consider an appropriate time for a review, Lussenhop said: "We cannot speculate on when, how, and in what manner [that step will be taken]."

Malacañang itself, through Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, did not set a timetable for the planned review of the 1999 agreement governing the conduct of visiting US troops.

The agreement had of late generated much controversy because of the custody dispute involving Smith, 21, who was convicted of raping a Filipino woman while on shore leave at the Subic Bay Freeport in November 2005.

According to Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, the United States cannot readily reject any future request for review of the VFA.

Santiago, chair of the bicameral Legislative Oversight Committee on the VFA (Lovfa), said that in the event the Department of Foreign Affairs sent a note verbale requesting a review based on a Congress resolution, the US government could not "simply reject the request off-hand."

"In the end, it will boil down to an either-or proposition: They accede to a review or we will terminate it," she said in a phone interview.

A US rejection of any request for review would mean that "it does not give due consideration to the evolving perspective of Filipinos concerning the treaty," said the senator, who also chairs the Senate committee on foreign relations.

"The plausible reaction to that will be to terminate the treaty," she said of the agreement ratified by the Philippine Senate.

US BACKS/ A6

LYN RILLON

LISTEN UP. And the generals do as their commander-in-chief talks to them during Ms Arroyo's New Year's traditional call on the joint Department of National Defense and the Armed Forces of the Philippines at Camp Aguinaldo. From left, AFP Chief of Staff Hermogenes Esperon, Army chief Lt. Gen. Romeo Tolentino, Gen. Pedrito Cadungog and Air Force chief Gen. Jose Reyes.

₱10-B bonanza for AFP modernization

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Dona Pazzibugan

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO HAS vowed to crush all armed threats to the country by 2010 by beefing up the Armed Forces' battlefield skills with a spending bonanza of P10 billion this year.

The President's traditional New Year call on the military top brass in their Camp Aguinaldo headquarters yesterday became a pre-procurement conference to finalize the shopping list of 14 major items to be bid out next week.

"The pre-procurement conference was the first step in the process of procuring P10 billion worth of equipment for the modernization," she later told soldiers.

A beaming AFP chief Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. emerged from the conference, announcing that the contracts had been approved "in record time, in just one day. Suddenly, we are ordering P10 billion worth of equipment."

He said it helped that the President was also the acting defense secretary, having taken over the defense portfolio temporarily, after her trusted adviser Avelino Cruz Jr. resigned last November

P10-B BONANZA/ A8

May election Round 3 of Gloria vs Erap fight

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE PALACE IS BILLING THE senatorial polls in May as Round 3 of the continuing battle between the forces of President Macapagal-Arroyo and her deposed predecessor, Joseph Estrada.

Michael Defensor, the President's chief of staff, yesterday said it had yet to be seen who would win in the third showdown. Ms Arroyo's senatorial slate swamped the Estrada team in 2001 and nosed out the opposition in 2004.

"It's too early to say what our chances are, but we are confident that once the public realizes that this is all about Arroyo and Estrada, it would understand the issues more and not be carried away by the anti-GMA rhetoric," he told the INQUIRER.

Despite being under house arrest for the past six years, Estrada remains the opposition's kingmaker, Defensor said.

He said this was why the May polls would be fought along the same lines as the last two elections.

MAY ELECTION/ A8

New York City hails 'Subway Superman'

NEW YORK—A NEW YORKER dubbed "Subway Superman" received the city's highest civic award on Thursday after pinning down a stricken stranger on subway tracks just enough to allow an oncoming train to run over the top of them.

Wesley Autrey, 50, jumped onto the subway tracks at a station in Manhattan's Harlem neighborhood on Tuesday to help Cameron Hollopeter, a 19-year-old film student who had suffered a seizure and fallen.

Autrey held down Hollopeter's convulsing body in the track bed as the train passed just centimeters above them. Both were uninjured, but Hollopeter, of Littleton, Massachusetts, remains in hospital undergoing tests to discover what caused his seizure.

Autrey, whose knitted cap was brushed with grease and dirt from the train passing overhead, played down his daring act as he accepted the Bronze Medallion—for exceptional citizenship and outstanding achievement—from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Autrey is "a great man—a man who makes us all proud to be New Yorkers," said the mayor.

Autrey then again provided details of his heroism to the media gathered at City Hall.

Autrey was standing on the platform with his daughters and scores of other subway riders when he saw

NEW YORK/ A8

FEASTING ON PDI: Cyrus David R. Duka, 5 months old, "literally interprets Francis Bacon's words that 'some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. Cyrus has chosen to taste the best newspaper in the land." Not our words but those of his father, lawyer and doctor in education Cecilo D. Duka who also contributed these photos. Thank you, guys, you made our new year.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

RP geologists rock, mines study shows

By DJ Yap

FILIPINOS CAN REALLY DIG IT.

For the past two decades, Filipino geoscientists have contributed to the discovery of 40 of the world's major mines, accounting for nearly $500 billion (P24.4 trillion) worth of gold and copper, according to a recent study.

A geoscientist studies any one of the sciences, such as geology or geochemistry, that deals with the earth.

"At least 69 Filipino geoscientists, mostly still active but a few have retired or passed away, have contributed in 40 copper-gold discoveries worldwide since 1980," the study titled "Impact of Filipino Geoscientists in the Minerals Industry" reported.

"These 40 discoveries comprise an estimated global mineral resource of about 69 million tons of copper metal and 3,447 tons of gold for a total value of $469 bil-

RP GEOLOGISTS/ A9

Terror alert, yes but no rain to ruin Asean parade

By Volt Contreras and Gil Cabacungan Jr.

THEY ARE MAKING SURE THE heavens will cooperate this time.

A lead organizer of the rescheduled 12th Summit of Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has confidently declared that "fair weather" will prevail over Cebu province during next week's meet, based on an official forecast he had obtained.

According to Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Luis Cruz, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) based its reading on the record of "average weather" in January "since 1945."

"I've gone one step ahead and got a report from Pagasa two days ago that there will be fair weather next week in Cebu," replied Cruz when asked about storm warnings.

The rescheduled summit will now be held from Jan. 10 to 15 and the government has confirmed that all 16 heads of state and government of Asean and its dialogue partners will attend.

The government's official line for the postponement of the annual summit of leaders of the 10-member Asean and their six East Asian dialogue partners, originally scheduled for Dec. 10 to 14, was the threat of typhoon "Seniang" which missed Cebu anyway.

However, many saw the real reason was the warnings of a possible terror attack on the Central Visayan province issued by Canada, Britain, Australia and the United States.

Yesterday, Canada, Britain and Australia were still warning their citizens against a possible terror attack on the Philippines days before the arrival of Asian leaders for the rescheduled summit, their embassies said yesterday.

The exact reasons for the renewed warnings are unclear although a nationwide manhunt has been ordered for a Vietnamese-American "terrorist" who allegedly tried to bomb the Vietnamese embassy in Manila. *(See related story on Page A9.)*

TERROR ALERT/ A8

Second FRONTPAGE

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Text us your feedback: inquirer news name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Northeastern Luzon will experience mostly cloudy skies with rainshowers. Visayas and Mindanao will have cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms becoming widespread rains over the eastern sections. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with light rainshowers.

COMPILED BY KATE PEDROSO, INQUIRER RESEARCH/01/05/07 SOURCE PAGASA

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

3 injured in Cotabato bomb blast

By Edwin Fernandez, Charlie Señase and Jeoffrey Maitem
Inquirer Mindanao

COTABATO CITY—A HOMEMADE BOMB HIDDEN IN A CARTON box exploded near a fast food restaurant along Makakua St. here around 11 a.m. yesterday, injuring three people, including a village official from Maguindanao.

Authorities blamed the bombings on the Abu Sayyaf, a bandit group with links to the Jemaah Islamiyah regional terror network, after it received reports last week that militants would carry more attacks in retaliation for the charges filed against two suspected Indonesian JI bombers.

Three improvised bombs were placed in a box and left on a road outside the restaurant, regional police Chief Superintendent German Doria told reporters. Only one went off.

"Before the explosion, we were receiving intelligence reports of a possible attack in the city," Doria said.

Two more bombs were recovered near the blast site.

One of the victims, Max Utto, a village official of Sultan sa Barongis, was critically injured because he was near the site of the explosion.

Two people were wounded in the legs and treated in a hospital, officials said.

A witness said he saw a man place the box at the sidewalk and hurriedly left the area.

Senior Insp. Samson Obatay, city police spokesperson, said they suspected members of the Abu Sayyaf and the JI could be behind the attack.

"We have intercepted a report that they will carry out attacks in major cities in Mindanao, including our city," Obatay told reporters, adding the make and type of explosive devices were similar to previous bombs assembled by the militants.

The area where the explosion occurred was normally a busy street because it is where many commercial establishments in the city are found.

"It's lucky that only a few were hurt and no one was killed," he said.

Obatay said the bomb that exploded near H&F Refreshment Parlor was fashioned out of a 60-millimeter mortar shell and was remotely detonated.

Cotabato police chief Superintendent Peraco Macacua said investigators recovered three sets of mortar fins as well as shattered and burnt parts of a cell phone; leading them to believe the device was triggered remotely using the mobile phone.

He said the blast shattered the restaurant's windows and those of two vehicles parked nearby.

On Dec. 29, a government prosecutor filed charges against Indonesian bombers Dulmatin and Omar Patek for the Oct. 10 blasts in Makilala, North Cotabato which killed at least eight people. Aside from Patek and Dulmatin, 23 members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were also charged.

Kidapawan City Prosecutor Al Calica said he found strong evidence that those charged were responsible for the attack in Makilala, which also wounded 28 others.

Prior to the filing of charges, three civilians were injured when alleged JI operatives bombed a mall in Tacurong City in Sultan Kudarat province.

Last October, an improvised bomb near a shopping mall in downtown Cotabato City damaged property but no one was wounded.

JI, a regional terror network based in Indonesia which has links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, has been tagged as a terror organization by Washington and other foreign governments because of its involvement in deadly bombings across the region.

These included the Bali blasts that killed more than 200 people, mostly Australians.

The JI is allied with the Abu Sayyaf group, which is said to be harboring Patek and Dulmatin.

Last month, the military said an informant led them to a jungle grave on Jolo where he claimed Abu Sayyaf chieftain Khadaffy Janjalani was buried in October after succumbing to battle wounds.

Authorities are awaiting the results of DNA tests to confirm if the body is that of Janjalani.

The Philippines has been on alert against possible militant attacks ahead of a gathering of 16 leaders from East Asia next week in Cebu, a month after the meetings were postponed, ostensibly due to a typhoon.

The British and Australian governments had warned militants were planning to attack the summit in December but the Philippine government has denied the meeting was cancelled because of security concerns.

The British, Australian and Canadian embassies in Manila still advise their citizens against travelling to Cebu but Manila has insisted there is no security threat. *With report from AP, Reuters*

FLOATING BOOKSHOP
MV Doulos, the world's largest floating bookshop, docks at the South Harbor in Manila. Doulos, built in 1914, is the world's oldest ocean-going passenger ship. It was bought by the German-registered charitable trust Gute Bucher fur Alle e.V. (Good Books for All) in 1977. It has welcomed 18 million visitors who have been on board for tours, programs and visits to the floating book fair. Run by volunteers from over 40 countries, it is in the Philippines from Jan. 4 to Jan. 23, 2007.

ERIK ARAZAS

Good news, bad news from Meralco

By Abigail L. Ho

CUSTOMERS OF THE MANILA ELECTRIC Co. may have to suffer a one-time additional charge of 26.14 centavos per kilowatt-hour (kWh) on their January bills, but at the same time see the generation charge component of the same month's bills go down by 1.92 centavos per kWh.

The ERC, in its order dated Dec. 13, approved "a temporary adjustment to cover the generation costs and system losses, including the value-added tax, incurred in October last year," Energy Regulatory Commission chair Rodolfo Albano Jr. explained.

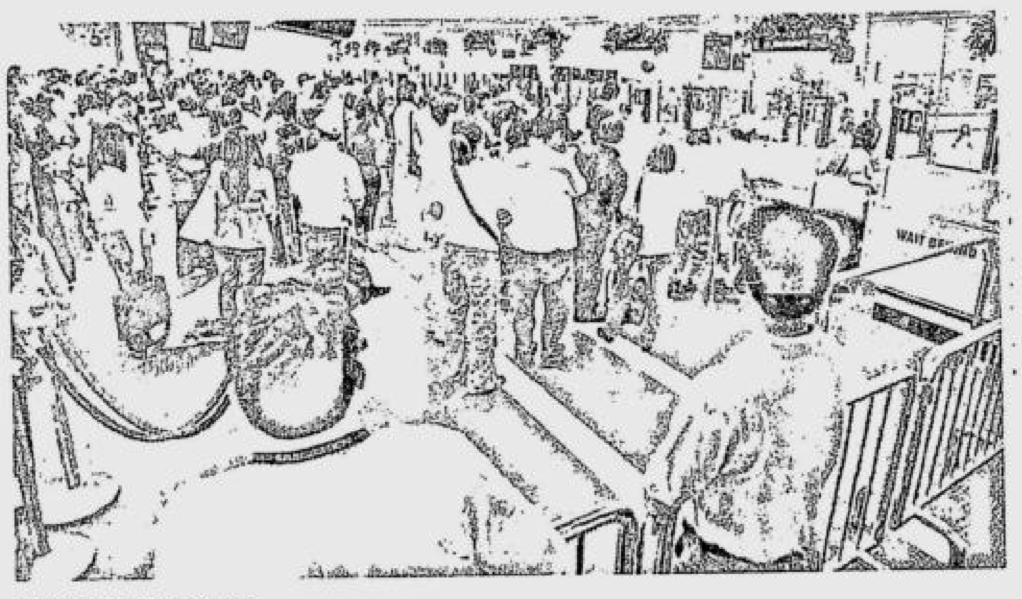
"The adjustment only enables Meralco to recover the amount it paid in advance to the generation companies to have a continuous supply of electricity in every household. Such adjustment does not result in any additional revenue for Meralco," Albano said.

The adjustment of 26.14 centavos per kWh in the January 2007 billing should no longer be reflected in the customers' bill for the following month—unless adjustments in the generation cost are subsequently ordered by the commission."

He further explained that the ERC's Dec. 13 order was not an approval of a rate hike petition by Meralco, but was merely an order allowing the company to recover costs related to power purchases from the wholesale electricity spot market, National Power Corp. and its independent power producers in September 2006.

According to the ERC, it also allowed Meralco to adjust its generation charge for January to P4.6904 per kWh, 1.92 centavos lower than the December generation charge of P4.7096 per kWh.

Meralco had actually sought a generation charge of P5.7334 per kWh, from the August rate of P4.4290 per kWh. The ERC, however, approved a generation charge of P4.6904 per kWh, to be charged this month.



TIGHT SECURITY
Members of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) and Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (BID) closely monitor the arrival of passengers at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila as part of deterrent measures against the entry of foreign activists planning to join protests during the Asean Summit in Cebu next week.

JESS YUSON

Army chief rejects 'mental torture' charges

By Dona Pazzibugan

PHILIPPINE ARMY CHIEF LT. GEN. ROMEO TOlentino yesterday rejected accusations two Army junior officers undergoing court-martial for the 2003 Oakwood mutiny were subjected to "mental torture" during solitary confinement.

"We're not holding anyone in solitary confinement," said Tolentino, as he turned down the request of the wives of 1Lt. Sonny Sarmiento and 2Lt. Aldrin Baldonado that the two officers be taken out of the Intelligence Security Group (ISG) compound in Fort Bonifacio.

Tolentino added that the officers' wives should not complain about their husbands' detention.

"The custodian determines the conditions of detention. We are not bound to follow what they want," the Army chief said.

He said the Army was being "extra careful" about securing Sarmiento and Baldonado since they were regarded as "high risk" prisoners.

On Jan. 17, 2006, Sarmiento escaped from Army detention with 1Lts. Lawrence San Juan, Nathaniel Rabonza and Patricio Bumidang Jr., all accused of participating in the Oakwood mutiny.

Baldonado along with Army 2Lt. Angelbert Gay and Navy Lt. s.g. Kiram Sadava did not report for work or went Awol (absent without official leave) shortly after.

San Juan was captured in February last year while the six officers were arrested at a safehouse in Quezon City on July 27, 2006.

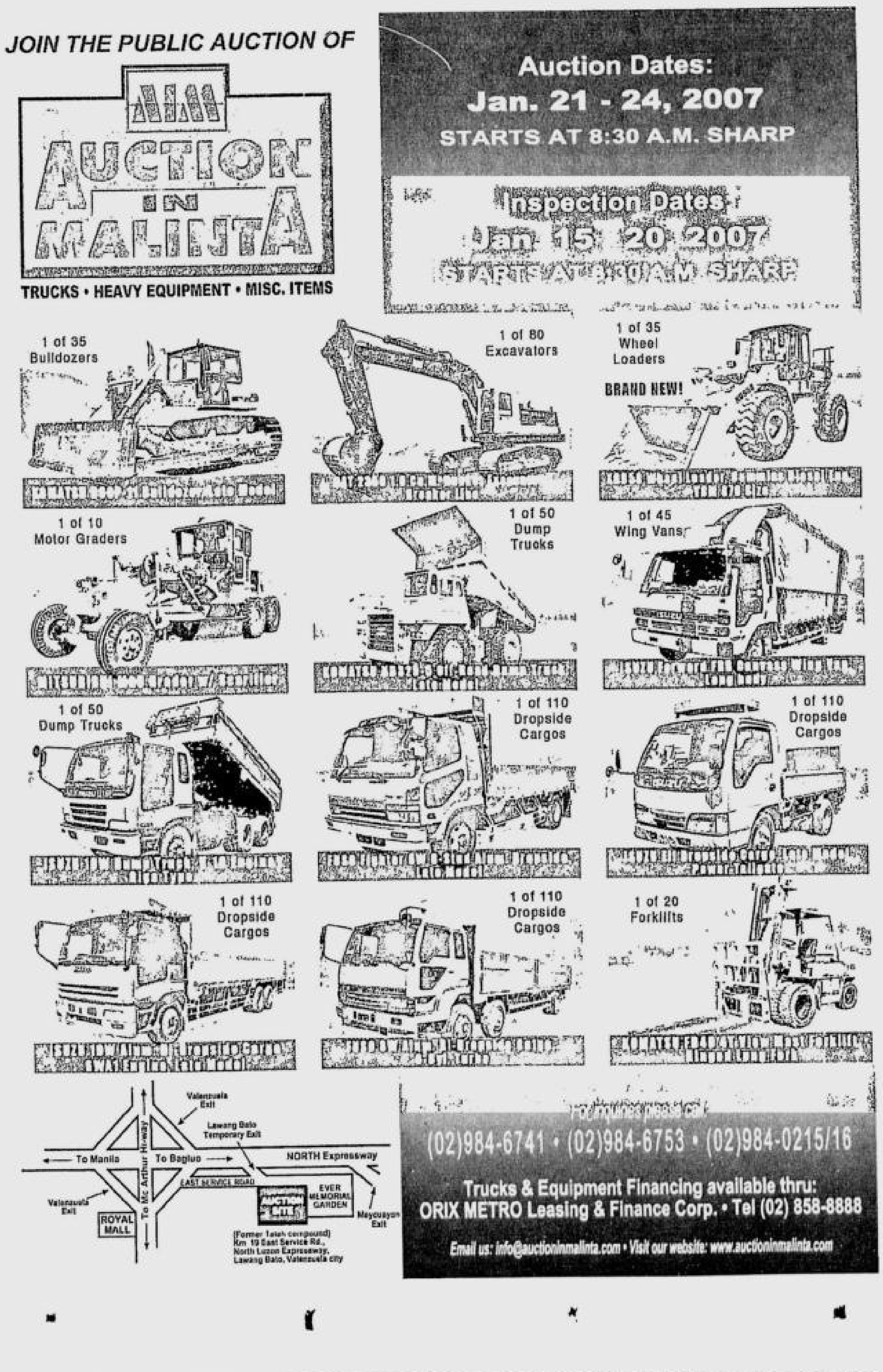
Since their capture, the officers had been kept at the maximum-security ISG compound, which is reserved for high-risk prisoners like Abu Sayyaf members.

Some of the rebel officers turned "state witness" one after the other. Only Baldonado and Sarmiento remain confined at the compound.

The wives of Sarmiento and Baldonado asked for "humane" treatment for their husbands while under detention. They said they were afraid that their husbands would go insane from prolonged confinement following their capture last July.

Tolentino denied that Sarmiento and Baldonado were being forced to sign affidavits that tag some opposition figures as their coddlers while they were on the run.

"No, you cannot force anyone to sign an affidavit. It has to be voluntary," Tolentino said.



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PNP seeks travel ban on Abra gov, 3 others; House to probe slay

By Alcuin Papa

VALERA RAFFY LERMA

POLICE HAS FORMALLY ASKED THE Department of Justice (DOJ) to issue a hold departure order against Abra Gov. Vicente Valera.

In a letter to the DOJ, Task Force Limbas, which nabbed Valera last Dec. 29 in Quezon City, said they received "intelligence reports" that the governor and three of his bodyguards were planning to leave the country to elude charges filed against them.

In Dagupan City, meanwhile, the House committee on public order and safety will hold a public hearing on Jan. 23 to look into the political killings in Abra.

Pangasinan Rep. Amado Espino Jr., committee chairman, said the hearing was a response to resolutions filed and privilege speeches delivered in the House urging Congress to look into the killings.

Valera is under suspicion as the mastermind of the Dec. 16 murder of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr.

In 2004, Bersamin sponsored House Resolution 00246 calling for an investigation of the proliferation of private armed groups maintained by politicians in Abra.

The resolution, among other things, had asked Espino's committee to "unearth several killings perpetrated by the same groups."

Valera has denied any involvement in the Bersamin murder.

However, former soldier Rufino Panday said that Freddie Dupo, a suspect in the Bersamin murder, told him that Valera had ordered the murder of Bersamin in exchange for P5 million.

Charges of illegal possession of firearms have been filed against Valera and his three bodyguards, Pedro Castillo, Oscar Abello, Leo Bello after traffic policemen found seven guns inside the governor's Chevrolet Suburban.

Valera's vehicle was flagged down in the early hours of Dec. 29 for traveling without license plates.

On Jan. 3, Valera posted a P290,000 bond for his temporary liberty. He also posted a bail of P20,000 for all three of his bodyguards.

Police also said yesterday they would be conducting a lifestyle check on the governor.

Aside from the Chevrolet Suburban worth P1.69 million, Valera is said to be the owner of a Ford Lynx, a Ford Everest and a Toyota Revo.

Police are also verifying information that Valera recently withdrew about P4 million from a bank in Abra.

In Baguio City, Senior Supt. Eduardo Bayangos, Cordillera director of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, said they were scheduled to file yesterday a separate illegal possession of firearm case against Valera in Bangued, Abra.

Bayangos said the case stemmed from the seizure of an unlicensed rifle from Valera's house in Bangued last month. He said the rifle was part of the evidence they recovered when they raided the governor's house on the strength of a search warrant issued by Executive Judge Romeo Zamora of the Quezon City regional trial court. *With reports from Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes and Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

4 men charged with murder of Laoag reporter

A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE AND three other men have been charged with murder in the killing of a radio reporter in Ilocos Norte, a town police chief said yesterday.

Andres "Andy" Acosta, who worked for radio station DZJC in Laoag City, died from stabbed wounds minutes after arriving at a hospital where he drove himself on a motorcycle in nearby Batac town in Ilocos Norte last month.

Batac police chief Supt. Bienvenido Rayco said the murder charge was filed last week against Joseph Calzado, of the provincial agriculture department, and three friends in the stabbing death.

A government prosecutor will determine whether there is enough evidence to bring the case to court.

Acosta, 46, apparently confronted the four men because they had allegedly scattered rocks and other debris on a highway near Calzado's residence, Rayco said. Acosta, who worked for radio station DZJC, had earlier reported unidentified people throwing rocks at motorists passing in the area.

Based on a list prepared by the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, Acosta was the 10th journalist killed in the country last year and the 83rd since democracy was restored in 1986.

Provincial Police Chief Roman Felix said the police do not consider Acosta's killing as work-related or politically motivated, describing it as "an ordinary street crime."

AP

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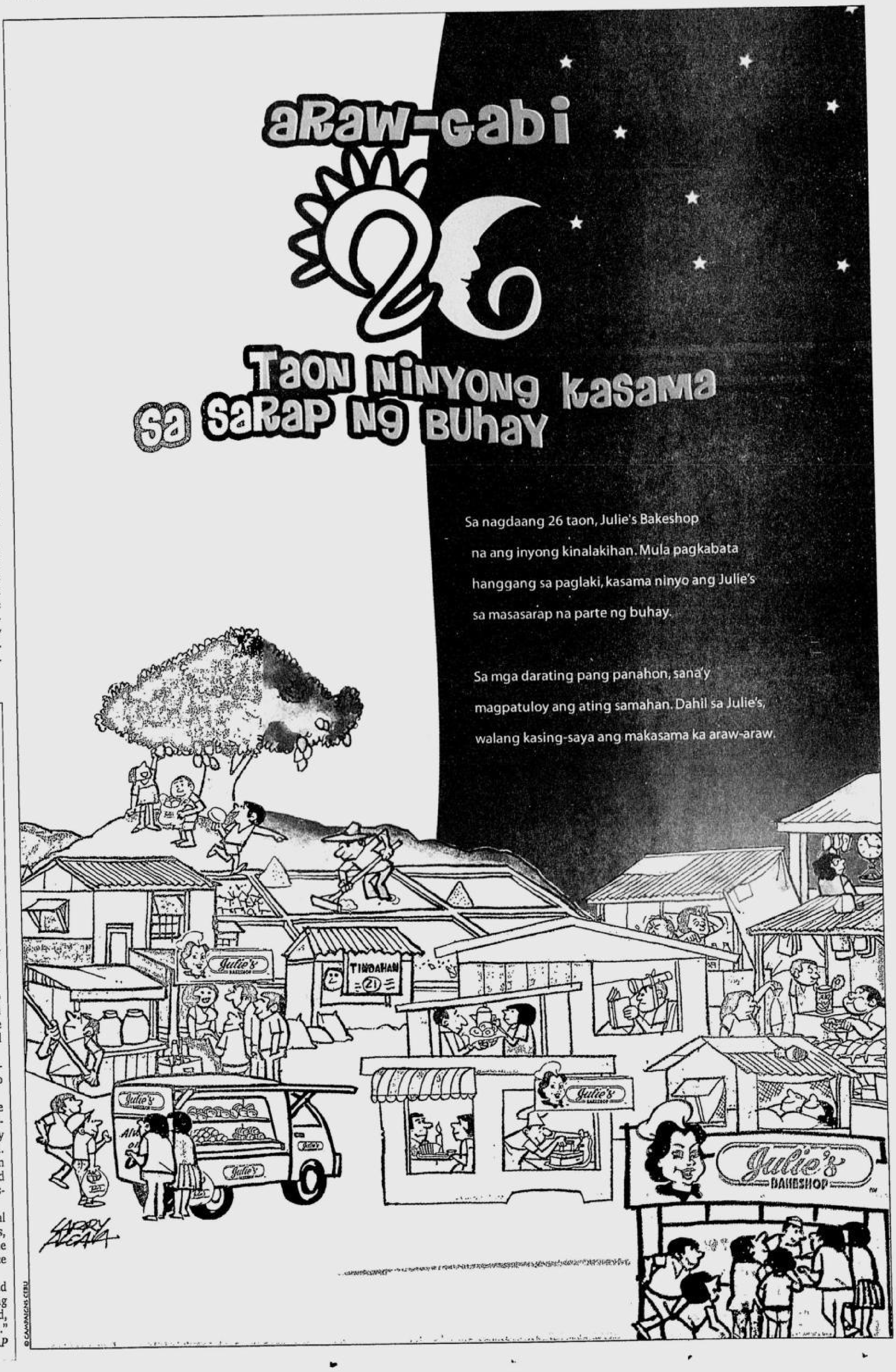


Sa nagdaang 26 taon, Julie's Bakeshop na ang inyong kinalakihan. Mula pagkabata hanggang sa paglaki, kasama ninyo ang Julie's sa masasarap na parte ng buhay.

Sa mga darating pang panahon, sana'y magpatuloy ang ating samahan. Dahil sa Julie's, walang kasing-saya ang makasama ka araw-araw.

Weak GMA population policy blamed for heavy toll in calamities

By Norman Bordadora

A UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-based organization yesterday blamed the Arroyo administration's weak population policy for the steady destruction of the country's watersheds and forests, among other areas of biodiversity, that led to heavy casualties during the heavy flash floods and massive landslides of 2006.

The damaging effects of "human population pressures" were outlined in two papers entitled "Critical Connections on Population and Biodiversity" and "Missed Connections: Population and Environment," presented by the Forum on Family Planning and Development (FFPD).

The country's yearly population growth rate of 2.36 percent adds 1.58 million "new Filipinos" annually and is a critical factor that puts pressure on the environment, said Ben De Leon, president of the FFPD and a former presidential population and social development adviser to then President Fidel Ramos.

The Philippine population, he said, was estimated at 86 million in 2006.

"Population growth and poverty compel people to live in ecologically dangerous zones such as forests, geological fault lines, slopes of active volcanoes, river banks given to unpredictable rises in water levels, and places along regular typhoon corridors," De Leon said.

Various parts of the archipelago have suffered from flash floods and landslides that claimed thousands of lives, the most recent being the flash floods that caused landslides along the slopes of Mt. Mayon in Albay, and Albay, and the most destructive being the landslide that hit Barangay Ginsaugon in Southern Leyte.

The FFPD also said the population boom is forcing people to move into places that should be reserved for forests and the country's biodiversity. This movement into ecologically dangerous zone also increases people's vulnerability to natural hazards," the FFPD said.

Areas that should be reserved as biodiversity reserves are forced to become agricultural areas and fishing grounds to produce enough food for the growing population.

Evidence shows the high proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, hunting and forestry hasten the loss in forest cover or biodiversity of an area," the FFPD said.

FFPD cited a study conducted by the environment think-tank Conservation International that showed a 10 percent increase in population density will result in a five percent decrease in forest cover.

"A high rate of poverty and joblessness drive this lowland-upland migration with the expectation of higher income from logging, and land availability for subsistence agriculture," it added

The Conservation International study shows that there are 23 provinces experiencing very high "socio-demographic pressures" on their forests.

These include the conservation priority areas in Palawan, Mindoro, Samar, the provinces of Cagayan Valley and those of the Cordillera Autonomous Region.

The FFPD said the Philippine Progress Report on its Millennium Development Goals in 2003 showed that the country has lost one million hectares of forests from 1990 to 1997.

"Mangroves have decreased to 120,000 hectares from 500,000 hectares over the last 75 years," the FFPD said in its report.

The group, quoting a study by Noela Lasmarias for the protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau and the National Economic Development Authority in 2004, also said that only five percent of the remaining coral reefs remain in excellent condition.

"Seagrass beds declined by 30 to 50 percent during the last 50 years," the FFDP said.

The FFPD has called for another national census to determine where the country stands with regard to its population. The last national census was done in 2000.

Morales seeks review of 2007 Customs target

By Leila B. Salaverria

CUSTOMS COMMISSIONER Napoleon Morales is seeking a review of the revenue target of the Bureau of Customs for 2007 in view of the stronger peso and the absence of new tax measures.

Morales appealed to Finance Secretary Margarito Teves to take another look at the bureau's P235 billion collection target for 2007, which is nearly 20 percent higher than its 2006 goal of P196 billion, saying the assumptions used as bases for setting the 2007 target could have changed.

"We are appealing to Secretary Teves to review our collection target," Morales told reporters.

He said that the BOC's P235 billion collection target for this year was premised on an exchange rate of P53 to $1, but noted that the peso has since strengthened and has gone down to a little over P48 to a dollar.

The exchange rate is significant because in collecting taxes and duties, the BOC bases its assessment on the dollar-denominated acquisition value of the imported goods.

Morales also said the absence of new tax measures this year could make it more difficult for the bureau to meet its target collection.

He said that in 2006, the value added tax was increased from 10 to 12 percent, thus boosting the bureau's collection.

The customs commissioner said he wanted a review of the target to determine whether the 20 percent increase was justified.

He said the country's economic managers might have other assumptions that led them to increase the bureau's target.

"We want to know why they imposed the 20 percent increase. Maybe they have assumptions. For instance, if they expect the importation to rise, then no problem. We just want to talk about whether 20 percent is reasonable or not," he said.

Morales also said he would continue to work to increase the bureau's collections by trying to eliminate smuggling activities at the country's ports.

He signed the other day a memorandum of agreement with international shipping lines under which the latter's vessels would send in advance to the BOC the copy of their cargo manifest before they reach the port of entry.

He said this would help the bureau prevent the misdeclaration, underdeclaration, misdescription or undervaluation of imported goods, which lead to technical smuggling and deprive the government of revenues.

Defensor defers Cabinet exit to fight Cha-cha bid

By Christine O. Avendaño

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO'S CHIEF of staff Michael Defensor will stay on the Cabinet for the moment to fight the fresh push to amend the Charter via a people's initiative.

Defensor, who was slated to resign this week to prepare for the senatorial race, said he was concerned about what he had been hearing the past weeks of the new push for Cha-cha being initiated by political allies of the President.

"This might only result into destabilization which we do not want in the face of the good economic conditions," he warned.

Hours before his news conference, Defensor was unaware that the people's group "Sigaw ng Bayan" had announced its bid to revive the people's initiative.

"(I) think there is a need to stop this... I think more than ever this second P.I. may really pose a danger not only to the President, to the administration but to the country in general," he said.

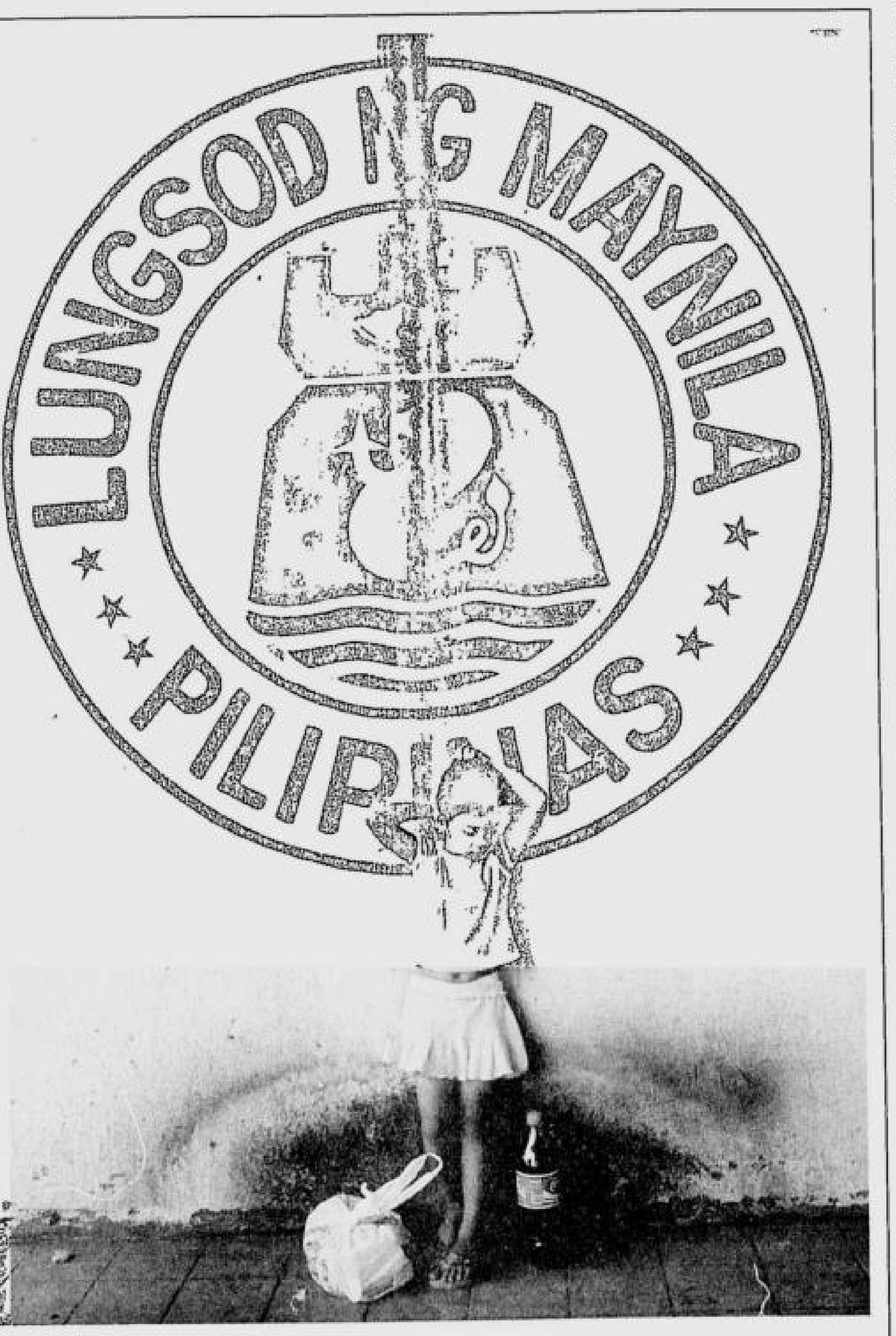
"Imagine a situation when a 2nd P.I is being pushed again and then you will have a divided Cabinet—some of them pushing, some opposing it—and you have different sectors of society both fighting it out."

Defensor said that as a loyal member of the President's Cabinet, "I deemed it necessary that I will be part and to openly speak against the second P.I. and to stop any effort coming from Malacañang or any other part of the Cabinet in pushing for the 2nd initiative."

Asked whether this effort is being pushed within Malacañang, he said there was "no such effort coming from us and I have been a witness to one of the discussions and my colleagues in the Cabinet here in Malacañang were preventing it."

Defensor said he had been talking lately to a lot of people, including Cabinet members, and that he expected some would come out to attack this new initiative.

"For us members of the Cabinet and the administration, we can quietly do this and influence our allies," Defensor said.



LITTLE GIRL'S TREASURE

Beneath a rust-stained seal of the City of Manila under the Nagtahan bridge, this little girl stands guard over a bag of groceries distributed by President Macapagal-Arroyo to residents of Baranggay 830 Zone 90 in South Nagtahan Thursday. LYN RILLON

BIR readies aggressive tax campaigns for 2007

By Cynthia D. Balana

THE BUREAU OF INTERNAL Revenue is readying aggressive tax collection programs this year to meet its 2007 collection target of P734 billion.

BIR Commissioner Jose Mario Buñag has instructed all BIR regional offices, district offices and national offices to come out with their own plans for an effective and successful tax collection effort this year.

Buñag said efforts would focus on improving the voluntary compliance of taxpayers, noting that collections from audit and investigation generally comprised just about two percent of total internal revenue collections. About 98 percent of BIR collections come from voluntary compliance.

At the same time, Buñag insisted that their collection target for 2006 was not P675 billion but only P601.4 billion which was to be derived solely from its operations.

He explained that of the P675 billion total collection target set by the national government for last year, P49 billion were treasury and P25 billion customs.

"How could the BIR collect the P49 billion from documentary stamp taxes when the Bureau of Treasury did not sell such instruments?" he asked.

He pointed out that the BIR "lost" P25 billion from the expanded value added tax collected because the amount was credited to the Bureau of Customs.

He said that total BIR collections hit P111 billion, or P20 billion more than the actual target.

On the tax collection programs, Buñag earlier extended the Improved Voluntary Assessment Program until Jan. 27 to enable taxpayers to avail of the last priority in audit for voluntary compliance with tax obligations.

He said that the Run After Tax Evaders (RATE) Program would be further tightened and fully enforced, adding that the BIR would not tolerate any evasion of the tax laws and regulations.

The BIR commissioner also directed the further widening of the tax base by expanding the list of actual and potential taxpayers through the computer system. This would make it easier to remind taxpayers of their tax obligations, including deadlines for payment of taxes, and possible delinquencies.

Buñag said that to encourage taxpayers to voluntarily file their tax returns and pay their taxes, the BIR national, regional and district offices should strengthen their information and other services to taxpayers.

PCGG claim on PLDT dividends sparks talk

By Daxim L. Lucas

THE GOVERNMENT'S MOVE TO collect up to P5 billion in unpaid cash dividends and accumulated interest payments from its sequestered stake in the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) is sparking speculation that a fast, bargain sale of the shares is in the offing.

In an interview yesterday, Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) Commissioner Ricardo Abcede tried to dispel the speculation, saying the government's demand is simply to "protect the interests of the Republic" by getting whatever funds are due to it.

Abcede said the agency's demand for at least P1.3 billion in cash dividends from the telecommunications giant—which could top P5 billion, including compounded interest—is not related to efforts to jumpstart stalled privatization efforts.

By staking its claim before the courts, PCGG ensures that these dividends will not accrue to the new owners once the privatization of the PTIC shares are completed, but to the government which has been holding on to these sequestered assets for the last 20 years.

After two decades of legal battles, the Supreme Court ruled last year against the heirs of Ramon Cojuangco and Ferdinand Marcos, declaring 111,415 shares of stock in Prime Holdings Inc. (PHI), which owns a 46 percent stake in PLDT, as "ill-gotten in nature."

The aggressive move to collect accumulated earnings is "unrelated to efforts to sell the shares [of the Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp]," Abcede countered.

"What we're trying to do is just make sure that we get the dividends that should accrue to us."

Abcede expressed confidence that PLDT will report an accurate figure of how much it owes the government, adding "we have ways of verifying this figure."

According to Abcede, the PCGG had written to PLDT earlier and met with its senior officials, all of whom assured him that the cash and stock dividends are being held in escrow, ready to be turned over once the government asks for it.

"The dividends have been put in escrow in a bank by PLDT itself, earning interest, for the benefit of the owner of the shares—in this case the government," he added.

Miaa revenues rise by 15% in 10 months

By Nikko Dizon

THE MANILA INTERNATIONAL Airport Authority (Miaa) generated gross revenues of P4.4 billion from January to October last year, up by 15 percent or P576 million compared to the same period last year.

Airport authorities said Miaa's failure to impose the proposed P200 security fee last year, as well as its inability to provide alternative power source to the airport terminals dampened its revenues for 2006.

"The revenues could have been bigger had the Miaa been able to implement the collection of certain fees planned or earmarked last year, like the security fee," Miaa general manager Alfonso Cusi said.

The Miaa's collection came from aeronautical fees, rental fees, concessionaire fees and terminal fees, among others.

Miaa had expected to collect P700 million annually from the imposition of the security fee, which the agency intends to use for the upgrading and maintenance of its security equipment at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport terminals.

Cusi earlier told the INQUIRER that the agency intended to impose the security fee not later than Jan. 15.

Miaa's net income amounted to P723 million, a 17 percent increase from the same period last year, and exceeded the agency's P608 million income target for January to October 2006.

The Miaa said international airport operations at the Naia increased by two percent in terms of flight and passenger movements and one percent in terms of cargo movements.

Domestic operations saw a 15 percent increase in passenger movement and a one percent increase in flight movements.

Domestic cargo movements, however, decreased by seven percent.

The Miaa said that figures from November to December were not included in the announced data.

However, the money to be used for the "legal costs, technical repairs and the required improvements" for the Naia would also eat into the Miaa's total revenues for 2006, the agency said.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, January 6, 2007
Before Epiphany
Bl. Andre Bessette

1st Reading: **1 Jn 5:5-13**
Gospel: **Mark 1:7-11 (or Luke 3:23-38 o 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38)**

John the Baptist preached to the people saying, "After me comes one who is more powerful than I am; I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As for me, I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals."

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth, a town of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And the moment he came up out of the water, heaven opened before him and he saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And these words were heard from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, the One I have chosen."

Commentary

Jesus has overcome the world, in water, blood, and the Spirit. And all three witness that life is in the Son, Jesus—life that is eternal, holy, truthful. To be in the Son in God we must believe the Word—and to believe, is to live that Word.

Mk: This is baptism. Jesus is baptized, and proclaimed by the Father to be his own beloved child, son, the chosen of God, as the Spirit descends upon him. This is our baptism, drawn into the presence of the Father, with Jesus, sharing Jesus' relationship to the Father in the power of the Spirit. We are his own beloved sons and daughters, children and chosen of God.

Lk: For 30 years, Jesus lives unknown, as the son of Joseph. And we are shown his ancestry, his long line in the history of believers, in Israel, the chosen people of Yahweh.

He does not come out of nowhere, but he appears as the fulfillment of the law, of prophets' warnings and promises, of hope and the faithfulness of God. He makes his appearance, begins to make himself known. His baptism sends him to reveal himself to the world.

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DON'T COUNT OUT CHA-CHA

Plebiscite still possible in time for May 14 polls, says Abalos

By Jerome Aning

A PLEBISCITE TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION may still be held simultaneous with the May 14 midterm elections, depending on how fast the proponents can muster another "people's initiative" or signature campaign in line with recently-issued implementing guidelines.

"It depends on how fast they can do it, if signatures can be gathered and verified quickly, then, yes, a plebiscite may be held on May 14," Commission on Elections chair Benjamin Abalos Sr. said yesterday.

In a media briefing, he noted that last year's controversial initiative which was rejected by the Supreme Court, took seven months to gather 8.9 million signatures. It was spearheaded by proponents Sigaw ng Bayan and the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines.

ABALOS: It depends on how fast they can do it.

3 months to do it

Under the law, they would have just a little over three months to regather about 55 percent of their original petitioners or 4.8 million signatures, which is the minimum number of signatures needed for a "people's initiative." This is equivalent to three percent of voters in each precinct, or 12 percent of the entire electorate. The Comelec will have to verify each and every signature.

The Comelec then has 30 days to decide on the sufficiency of a petition for Charter change. The plebiscite may be set not earlier than 45 days or not later than 90 days after petition is approved by Comelec.

There remains about 140 days before the May 14 congressional and local elections.

Critics criticized

Abalos lashed at Comelec's critics who accused the agency of conspiring with the Arroyo administration to facilitate Cha-cha by fast tracking the issuance of supplementary guidelines for a new people's initiative.

Abalos said Comelec Resolution No. 7796, which the Commission approved en banc last Jan. 2, was in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling that affirmed the sufficiency of RA 6735 and left to Comelec the job of threshing out implementing rules and regulations (IRRs) to enforce it.

Malicious interpretation

"Why do people have a malicious interpretation of this? If we don't act, we'd be criticized of being remiss in our duties," he said.

"The Supreme Court said the law on people's initiative is complete. If we don't issue the IRR, how can we implement the law? If someone files an initiative petition tomorrow, and we don't have the IRR, what will they say?" he said.

Abalos said Resolution 7796 will prevent the use of questionable methods in the gathering of signatures.

"All fears about the way the signatures are gathered will now be taken care of," Abalos assured.

Avoiding another 'grand deception'

Resolution 7796 provides:

- That those pushing for the initiative must also ensure that before the registered voters sign the petition to signify their support for it, they "must have read and understood the petition and the proposed amendments to the Constitution."
- That signature-gathering shall be "the exclusive domain and private concern of the proponents," and that all expenses relative this initiative shall be solely borne by the proponents.
- That specific forms be used for the initiative petition proper, the certification of the required number of signatories and the verification report for the signatures.
- That signature stations may be established by the proponents. The initiative backers will inform the election officers where the stations will be set up, the dates for the signature gathering and the dates when the signatures will be submitted for verification.
- That procedures for verification of signatures should use the registry list of voters, voter's affidavits and voter's identification card used in the immediately preceding election.
- Significantly, that the verification can be done "during or after" the signature-gathering process, with the election officer required to give the public two-weeks advance notice of the verification dates.

The election officer must also "exert all efforts to verify the signatures submitted in "the most expeditious and efficient manner and shall refrain from any unnecessary delay," the resolution stated.

Anti-Cha-cha moves

Meanwhile, militant peasant, labor and urban poor groups yesterday vowed to block any attempt by Ulap, Sigaw or any other administration allies to push for a second people's initiative for Cha-cha.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas secretary-general Danilo Ramos said campaign battles would primarily be fought in the villages and communities where the agents of the administration would "again try to fool the people into signing another spurious initiative to gain millions of signatures."

'We will fight all the way'

"We will fight this all the way, from the barangays and villages up to the national level; the key here is intensive and extensive education campaigns against Cha-cha and the disastrous effects it would have on Philippine society, especially us farmers," he said.

Anakpawis Rep. Crispin Beltran said the new Comelec resolution was "another cockeyed government scheme to rush Cha-cha and ram in constitutional revisions that will favor the proponents and their economic and political backers.

The detained congressman said with the May polls approaching, Comelec should just focus on its preparations for ensuring orderly and fraud-free elections.

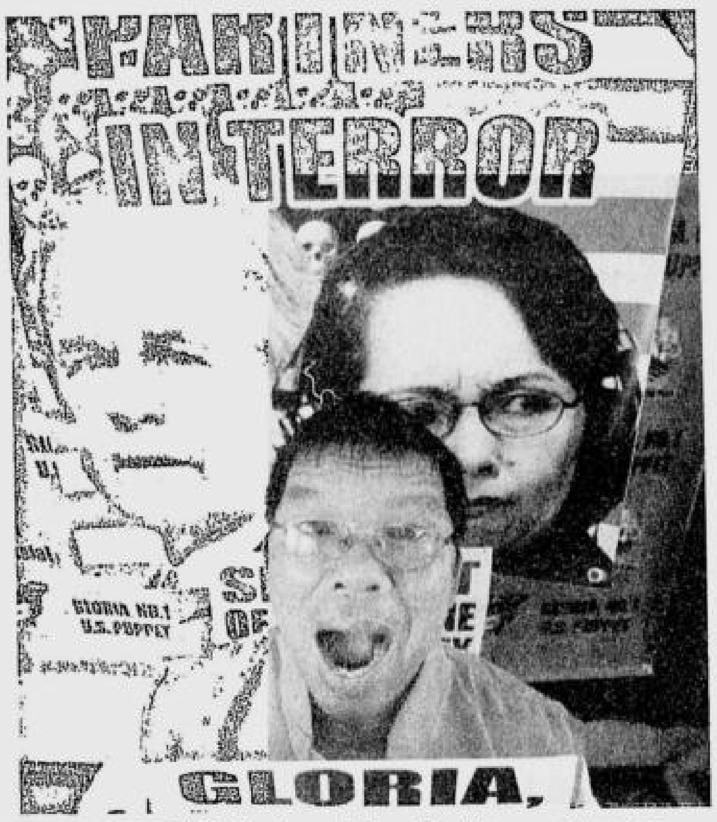
Ramos said that Comelec "should not also have hastily [come out with Resolution 7796] because it has again opened an avenue for unscrupulous groups and individuals to push their self serving agenda."

Very self-serving

"They should not have permitted government officials to lead such initiatives, because it is very self-serving," the peasant leader said. "It also adds to the strong public perception that the Comelec is a willing administration tool to change the Constitution and perpetuate itself in power."

Beltran said Cha-cha at this point would fail because the people were clearly against it.

"Any campaign to amend the constitution that's initiated by Malacañang and its allies can never be credible, and it can never bid any good for the Filipino people and the nation," he said. "The self-serving and power-hungry agenda of its main proponents are transparently clear and present."



SEE YOU IN CEBU. Members of the militant Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) announce their plan to stage protest rallies during the Asean summit in Cebu next week. INQUIRER PHOTO/JOAN BONDOC

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US balks at VFA review

From page A1

Santiago said Lussenhop's statement that a review would be "premature" was his own opinion. "That's their point," she said.

Ripe for review

As a reaction to Bunye's announcement of Malacañang's resolve to review the VFA, Santiago said she would call a hearing of the Lovfa after Congress resumes sessions on Jan. 22 for the purpose of drafting a resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the agreement should be renegotiated.

After Congress passes this resolution, the DFA can send a note verbale to the US government requesting a review. But if the US government rejects this, the Philippine government has the option to give a one-year notice of termination, Santiago said.

The senator said that the VFA was "ripe for review," and that some of its terms had to be clearly defined.

These terms include the "completion of judicial proceedings," of which the judiciary on one hand and the executive branch on the other have conflicting interpretations.

"It should not be the judiciary, but the political branches—the executive and legislative branches—which should have a prerogative to define the terms of an international agreement," the senator said.

Santiago, a staunch administration ally, said President Macapagal-Arroyo took the right step in calling for a review of the agreement that, the senator noted, was "almost a decade old."

"The President has to respond to public opinion. She's responsible to the electorate," Santiago said.

Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, a Lovfa member, agreed that there should be a review of the agreement that he, Santiago and 16 other senators ratified in 1999.

"Remember, the ball is on the court of the executive at this point, especially on the review. It is not the legislative that will negotiate with the US; it's going to be the executive," Biazon told reporters.

To the suggestion that the government abrogate the treaty instead of reviewing it, he said: "Abrogation is not yet on the table. The only thing that I think has secured a consensus is the need for review."

'Why blame us?'

Michael Defensor, the President's chief of staff, wondered why the Arroyo administration seemed to be taking the brunt of criticism for Smith's return to US custody even in the absence of an order from the Court of Appeals.

Defensor said the executive branch handled the custody case as provided for by the VFA, which, he pointed out, was neither negotiated nor signed by the Arroyo administration.

"Who signed the VFA? It was then President Joseph Estrada. Who ratified the agreement? It was the Senate at that time, many members of whom are still at the Senate," Defensor told reporters.

Asked if he was then blaming the Estrada administration for the agreement, he countered: "But why blame us?"

Call for cooperation

In a statement, Surigao del Sur Rep. Prospero Pichay and Cebu City Rep. Antonio Cuenco called on US authorities to address public concern over Smith's transfer to American custody by "working diplomatically" to amend the VFA.

Pichay, vice chair of the Commission on Appointments, and Cuenco, chair of the House committee on foreign affairs, made the call in reaction to Lussenhop's statement that a review of the VFA at this point would be premature.

"The VFA is a must because it is in line with the 1951 RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty. But its terms and conditions can be reviewed any time," Pichay said.

"The US should show sensitivity to the present situation by not shooting down immediately a review of the VFA," he said.

Cuenco, who also cochairs the Lovfa, said Lussenhop's statement was "counterproductive and unhelpful to the Philippine government, which is being hit for faithfully abiding by the VFA while weathering the uproar over [Smith's] transfer." *With a report from Christine O. Avendaño*

Palace now dead set to kill VFA commission

From page A1

tration Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago.

"I understand that Malacañang will now abolish that office through executive order. They will no longer wait for the 2007 budget to be passed," Santiago, chair of the Legislative Oversight Committee on the VFA, said in an interview.

Insubordination

Santiago said she agreed with the President's plan, noting that the statements aired by VFACom executive director Undersecretary Zosimo Paredes slamming the Malacañang's transfer order constituted "insubordination."

The Inquirer learned that Paredes was summoned yesterday to the Palace by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita. At press time, the Inquirer was unable to reach Paredes.

As part of the executive branch, the VFACom should conform to the policy set by the Foreign Secretary, Santiago said. "It's an act of insubordination for a minor member of an executive agency to contradict the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. The government cannot afford to have a subordinate overrule a superior with respect to foreign policy. We can't be speaking in different voices."

The senator said she believed that there was no more need to maintain the VFACom, whose function of monitoring the implementation of the VFA duplicated that of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Paredes charged that the executive branch "took the law into its own hands" when it whisked Smith out of the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy at close to midnight on Dec. 29 even before the Court of Appeals had yet to rule on a custody case.

Santiago, who also chairs the Senate committee on foreign relations and who had tangled with Paredes in the past over differences of opinion on foreign affairs matters, said it would be prudent for Malacañang to let go of the VFACom chief.

"He should be let go. There's no need to file an administrative case. He's too minor a figure," she said.

The senator said as chief of the VFACom, Paredes was expected to hew to the administration line even if he had the tendency to "speak out of turn."

'Personality disorder'

"If he's speaking from his conscience and he can't openly contradict the administration, then he should resign," she said.

Santiago had sought the abolition of the VFACom as early as two years ago because of the executive director's "personality disorder."

'DAVID VS GOLIATH'

Nicole's mother praying for miracle

By Tarra Quismundo

PRAYER IS THEIR SWORD and truth is their shield, according to the mother of "Nicole," the Filipino woman now fighting to have her convicted rapist removed from US custody and returned to a Philippine jail.

In the family's fight against "Goliath," hopes for a miracle are high, the 48-year-old mother told the Inquirer yesterday on the phone.

"As I've said, this is a fight between David and Goliath. They (US officials) are powerful. Gloria (President Macapagal-Arroyo) is powerful. But we have to pray, and we tell the truth. Those are our only weapons," the mother said. "But miracles happen, right? David always wins."

Despite the family's drained resources and weary spirits, the mother said, she and her other children would continue to support Nicole in fighting for justice and victory over Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith.

The US Marine was convicted of rape on Dec. 4 and slapped a jail sentence of up to 40 years.

Despite a pending petition at the Court of Appeals, he is now back in American custody after being removed from the Makati City Jail and transferred to the US Embassy in Manila on Dec. 29 through an executive agreement between Philippine officials and US diplomats.

Evalyn Ursua, Nicole's lawyer, called the transfer an "escape."

Not letting up

Nicole's legal team is preparing to ask the Supreme Court to declare the executive agreement "illegal and unconstitutional."

"Of course, we will continue assisting Nicole. We will finish what we started. We are not letting up and, besides, there are many people supporting us," said the mother.

The longtime civilian employee of the Philippine Navy reiterated that she had spent millions of pesos from her savings and the family's earnings, sold property and taken out numerous loans just to get Nicole through the yearlong legal proceedings.

And since the rape in November 2005, she has been on leave without pay from the Navy, she said.

"My family keeps on praying. In all that we do, we put our full trust and confidence in God. We know that nothing is impossible with God," the mother said.

She said she was leaving it to karma to get back at the woman she blamed for Smith's transfer: *"Ka-karma-hin din si Presidente."*

No legal basis

But Joan de Venecia, one of Smith's lawyers, defended the transfer and said there was "no legal basis" for the petition of Nicole's camp seeking the dismissal of the soldier's appeal of his guilty verdict and the issuance of an arrest warrant against him.

Filed on Tuesday before the appellate court, the pleading was premised on a rule that, Ursua said, provided for the immediate dismissal of an appeal of a convict who had escaped prison.

Speaking by phone from Smith's holding room at the Jusmag building in the US Embassy compound, De Venecia said the pleading had been superseded by the appellate court's Jan. 3 decision.

That decision said Smith's pending petition to be returned to US custody had been rendered "moot" by his Dec. 29 transfer. But it also upheld Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon's ruling on Dec. 13 that Smith must stay in Philippine custody because US jurisdiction over him was terminated upon his conviction..

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INQUIRER

CHA-CHA AGENDA

Puno tells governors to focus on May elections

PUNO advises pro-administration governors to move on. Photo taken on Tuesday at the DILG office. JOAN BONDOC

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A LITTLE OVER A WEEK BEFORE THE nation's governors convene to decide whether to continue to support Charter change, a Cabinet secretary has urged them to train their resources on the May elections instead.

In an interview with the INQUIRER on Thursday, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno said: "My advice to the governors is to just focus on the elections. There comes a time you have to move on and start talking about the elections instead of going back again. Especially all of them [who] are running, they should prepare for the elections rather than other things."

Puno's statement was by far the clearest sign Malacañang was slackening off in its drive to push for constitutional reforms ahead of this year's May elections, as strongly urged by Speaker Jose de Venecia and the Lakas faction of President Macapagal-Arroyo's Cabinet. Puno is the former chair of Kampi, the President's party.

Ilocos Sur. Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson, chair of the League of Provinces of the Philippines, had called for a meeting of all the country's governors on Jan. 12 to decide whether they would continue to push for Charter change and how, after the President announced that she remained keen on reforming the Constitution.

Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone, a pro-Cha-cha proponent, said that a group of local government officials had been clamoring for the filing of a second people's initiative petition.

Unlike the first petition, which was thrown out by the Supreme Court, Evardone said the second petition would call for the retention of the President, a shift to a unicameral congress and the holding of the May elections.

The Lakas faction in the Cabinet had twice failed to get the Constitution amended—the first time via a people's initiative and the second through a constituent assembly—largely because both modes called for the postponement of the May elections and this would automatically extend the terms of the incumbent officials.

"If they (the governors) are hoping that there will be no elections, they will just be frustrated," Puno said.

Making sure the elections pushed through this year was "very important" to the country, according to Puno. "We should have elections because it is a way for [the] people to express themselves, negatively or positively, hopefully positively," he said.

Top Labor official doubts Filipino nurses will make beeline for Japan

By Jerome Aning

A SENIOR DEPARTMENT OF LAbor and Employment official yesterday doubted Filipino health workers would be making a beeline for Japan once the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) was in force.

The pact was signed in September 2006 by President Macapagal-Arroyo and then Japanese Premier Junichiro Koizumi.

"I don't think many of our medical workers would want to go there. Japan is not that attractive (as a destination for health workers) compared to the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom, which are westernized and where our nurses can easily adapt to the working conditions," said the official, who asked not to be identified since he was privy to the talks that led to the free trade agreement that is awaiting ratification in the Philippine Senate and the Japanese House of Councilors.

The JPEPA recently generated controversy when it was learned it might allow for the dumping by Japan of toxic waste in this country. This, however, was quickly denied by both the Philippine and Japanese governments.

"Even if the Japanese give our nurses and caregivers higher pay, I doubt if many would be [willing to] go through the difficulty of [having to] learn the Japanese language and culture, when they could go to an English-speaking country," the official said.

Moreover, the source said, deployment to the US, the UK or Canada gives Filipino nurses a chance to become immigrants to those countries and to petition for their families later.

"Our Filipino medical workers can afford to be choosy because there is a high global demand for them," he told reporters.

It will be recalled that the pact to allow Filipino caregivers into Japan limited to 1,000 the number of Filipino nurses allowed to work in that north Asian country.

A wire agency report the other day said the deal on the nurses was done "more due to pressure from the Philippines than any desire by Japan."

The labor official contradicted this, however, saying that during negotiations for the "transfer of human personnel" portion of the pact, Manila opted to drop its insistence on a demand-based deployment and bowed to Tokyo's "quota-based" stand.

"Even if we got the Japanese to agree to a demand-based deployment, we realized that Japan was determined to restrict the entry of Filipino nurses [there] anyway by demanding that they undergo two-year language and cultural skills training," he said.

But the official said the stringent skills training for foreign nurses was "understandable" since most of them would be working with elderly Japanese.

Also, Japanese medical groups have been "very strong and influential" about lobbying the Japanese parliament, known as the Diet, against accepting foreign nurses, the labor official said.

The trade pact, formally known as the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement, is awaiting ratification in the Philippine Senate and the Japanese House of Councilors.

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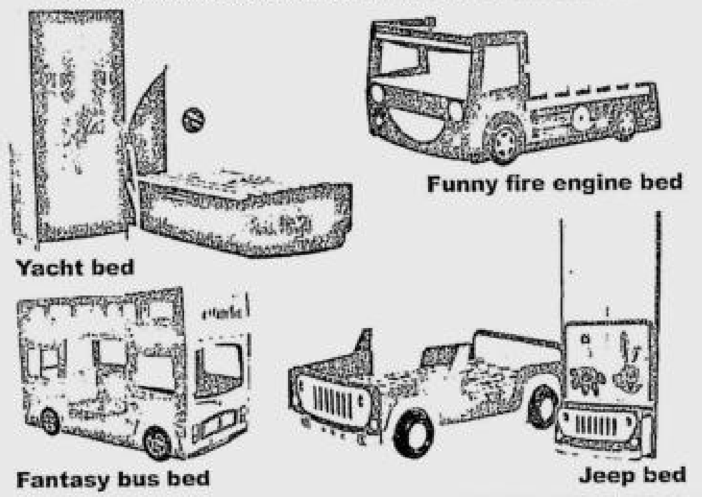

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INQUIRER TV GUIDE
Saturday, January 6, 2007

America naman ang maghahanap ng Idol!
ABC Iba Tayo!
American Idol
Season 6
JANUARY 17

ClickTheCity.com

Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABC 5	Amerika, Atbp.		Kids TV	TBA						Teka Mona		Ripley's Believe It or Not		Shall We Dance		TBA		Araw-Araw Pamyo Sa Hasbo	Simbang Gabi
ABS-CBN 2		Nagmamahal, Kapamilya		Let's Go		Star Magic Presents		TV Patrol World	Komiks: Pedro Penduko		John En Shirley		XXX		TBA		Aalog alog		Sports Unlimited
bTV	Overtime Bill Walton	PBA TV	NBA Spls: Grtst Moment History	NBA: Jazz @ Rockets					NCAA Men's Basketball				NBA Live	NBA Fantasy Hoops	NBA: Jazz @ Rockets				
Cinema One	Mr. Suave				Slaw				Han Ng Sablay				Ang Utol Kong Hoodlum				Sandalang Bahay		
Cinemax				Babylon 5: The Gathering			Crowned And Dangerous			Life Without Dick				The School Of Rock				Caved In	
CNN	Next@CNN	World News	Inside The Middle East/CNN Bus Traveller/Global Office/Global Challenges	World News	World Sport	Larry King Live		World News	World Sport	World News	Living Golf/ Revealed/Main Sail/Art of Life	World News	World Sport	World News	Inside The Middle East/CNN Bus. Traveller/ Global Office/ Global Challenges	CNN Presents/Quest	Next@CNN	Talk Asia	The Daily Show With Jon Stewart
Crime/Suspense		The Unit		The Closer		Law and Order		C/S Chronicles: Cold Case Files		Bones		The Unit		E-Ring					
Discovery Channel		Building the Ultimate II	Building The Ultimate	Ancient Clues		Power Zone				Perfect Disaster		Deadliest Catch		Best of Discovery 2006				Perfect Disaster	
Disney Channel	Maya & Miguel	Totally Spies/ Totally Spies 100th Ep	Hannah Montana Catch Up Weekend			Hannah Montana	American Dragon Yr. 2	Emperor's New School	Suite Life Of Zack And Cody	Mr. Bean	Wonderful World Of Disney			America's Funniest Home Video	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mortified	Wonderful World Of Disney	
ESPN				Watersports Programming Hot Water		Women's Pro Billiards '06		Great American Events '06		Dakar Rally '07 Euromilhoes	NBA Action	NBA: Mavericks @ Spurs					Table Tennis '04 Invitational C'ships	FA CUP 2006/07 Rd3	
ETC		Everwood Season 2		Friends	Will & Grace	Veronica Mars		The O.C.		Beauty And The Geek		Queer Eye For The Straight Guy		Saturday Night Live		Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	
ETC 2nd Avenue		Nanny 911		Today Show - 1 Hour - Version		Dateline		The Biggest Loser 1		NBC Nightly News	Hollywood One On One	Cold Turkey 2		Inside The Actor's Studio		ER		NBC Nightly News	WSJR
Fox News		Hannity & Colmes		On The Record With Greta Van Susteren		The O'Reilly Factor		Your World With Neil Cavuto		Special Report With Brit Hume		Fox & Friends Saturday						Bulls & Bears	Cavuto On Business
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HBO			The Baby-Sitters Club			Star Trek First Contact				Good Burger				Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo				Bats	
Hero TV	Super Doll Licca	Pretty Cure	Chrono Crusade	Power Rangers Ninja Storm	Mask Rider Faiz	Justirisers	Power Rangers Dino Thunder	Sorcerer Orphen	Forzal Mario	Street Fighter	GPX Cyber Formula	G3	EK TV Special	Wowing Marathon: Beyblade-O-Rama Weekends				Chrono Crusade	DNAngel
IBC 13		Home Shopping Network		EZ Shop	Auto Review	Japan Video Topics/ Ams		Pangarap Kong Jackpot		EBC Earth Files		Japan Video Topics/ Ams		Btag		EBC Earth Files	Medtalk With Dr. Z		
JackTV	My Name Is Earl	Always Sunny In Philadelphia	Arrested Development	Last Comic Standing		The Daily Show With Jon Stewart	The Daily Show Jon Stewart	X-Men	X-Men	The Batman	Justice League	Wwe Raw				Weekend At The D.L.	Reno 911	Insomniac With Dave Attell	Manshow
Lifestyle Network	HGTV Special		Napa Style	Sheila Bridges: Designer Living	Radical Sabbatical	Simply Wine Andrea Immer	Inside Dish	My Country, My Kitchen	Emeril Live		Iron Chef America		Merge		How Do I Look		Style Star	E! Entertainment Special	
MTV Philippines								Cribs	My Own	The Hills									
MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Bandarito	MYX News	MYX Presents		Take 5	Radio MYX	MYXellaneous	Star MYX	OPM MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Live!		Pinoy MYX Countdown				MYX Backtrax	MYXlog
National Geographic	Mad Labs	Family Hour: Giant Pandas		Family Hour: A Life Among Whales		Triumph of Life 4 Billion Year War		Naked Science: Lightning		About Asia		I Didn't Know That	I Didn't Know That	Inside the Forbidden City				Triumph of Life 4 Billion Year War	
NBN											The Working President	GSIS Member's Hour		Isla Hour On NBN		A.S.K.		Krusada Kontra Krimen	
Net 25	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Quadriga	The Planet	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Tamang Daan		Net 25 Weekend Report	DWTV Journal Weekend Edition	Tribe	Convergence	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Pagbubunyag		Net 25 Weekend Report	In Focus	DWTV Journal Weekend Edition	Euromaxx
Nickelodeon	The Adventures Of Jimmy Neutron	Zoey 101	Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide	The Fairly Odd Parents	Catscratch	The X's	Danny Phantom	Trollz	SpongeBob SquarePants	All That	Zoey 101	Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide	Romeo	Naturally Sadie	All That	All Grown Up	As Told By Ginger	My Dad The Rock Star	
PBO			Isang Lahi, Isang Dugo				Maging Akin Lamang				Go Na, Sige Na				Swindler's List				Gawin Sa Dilim 2
Qtv		Lois And Clark		Elementar Gerad		Posh		The Return Of Wonder Woman		Aytl Robot		Day-Off		Sabado Showdown				Moby Dick	
RPN 9										Wwe Raw		CSI: NY		Saturday Night Playhouse					
SBN 21								Barangay Uniting thru Chess		Sony Music Video		Oras Ng Himala		Oras ng Katotohanan		Sheperds Voice		Sony Music Video	
Solar Sports				FIVB		Hoop Nation		Raceworld		WNCAA		Rookie Manual	Pinoy Rider	Night Watch				ECW	
Star Movies	An Unfinished Life (2:45 PM)				Around The World In 80 Days (4:35 PM)				Star Wars: Episode II - Attack Of The Clones (6:35 PM)									The Sixth Sense (10:55PM)	
Star World		Third Watch		Hollywood Shootouts	Desire Table For Three		Frasier	Philly		One Tree Hill		TNA Xplosion		Ghost Hunters		Desire Table For Three		Mutant X	
Studio 23								Sports TV	Pinoy Dream Academy		Survivor Cook Islands		Supernatural		Barkada Nights				Reel Deal
UNTV				KNC Show	Ang Dating Daan	Chika Mo, Chika Ko		Believer TV				Ang Dating Daan							

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₱10-B bonanza for AFP modernization

From page A1

over differences on the Charter change issue with other Cabinet members.

"We've shortened the process very much," said Esperon.

In her speech, the President told the military top brass that she wanted them "to achieve a strategic defeat of the communist terrorist movement by 2010, destroy the Abu Sayyaf and other terrorist groups and contain the secessionist groups in order to establish a secure environment conducive to national development."

Improved fiscal position

The President said that with the government's vastly improved fiscal position, it could now allocate an initial P10 billion, with the promise of even more funds, to carry out the Armed Forces Modernization Law which she helped write as a senator in 1995.

"That law called for a 15-year modernization program, which means that it should be completed by 2010. We will strive hard to finish the implementation of the modernization program by 2010 as scheduled," said the President who blamed the government's poor finances for the delay.

"After we have bid out all of the P10 billion or published the invitation for the bidding, we will release new funds for other purchases," she said.

"When we do all these, I do hope that the more than 100,000 ordinary soldiers in the field will also benefit with a better way of living," Ms Arroyo said.

Shopping list

Lt. Gen., Antonio Romero, head of the military panel on upgrading equipment, said big-ticket items to be purchased include six refurbished UH-1H helicopters, 20 upgraded MG-520 attack helicopters and several shallow water boats for soldiers to penetrate river systems and marshlands in the south.

Other items on the shopping list included assault rifles, tactical radios and bullet-proof vests.

He said all the equipment can be delivered within the year, except for the helicopters which usually take about a year from the time of the approval of the contract to actual delivery.

In the pipeline

Of the promised P10 billion, however, the military only has P5 billion on hand which was released in April 2006.

Romero said they are still waiting for the release of the other P5 billion, although P3.9 billion was already in the pipeline.

During the meeting, Ms Arroyo called up Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya to speed up the release of the remaining P5 billion.

Romero said the military was ready to hold a public bidding for the contracts, most of which will be approved by the bids and awards committee (BAC) of the defense department headed by Assistant Secretary Robert Nuque.

The DND-BAC approves contracts worth P50 million and above, while the AFP-BAC, chaired by Rear Admiral Alfredo Abueg, approves contracts below P50 million.

DND chief approving power

Malacañang used to approve contracts worth at least P500 million, but it has passed on the approving power to the defense secretary.

Romero said the P5 billion they already have could pay for 10 of the 14 items on their procurement list.

He said these 10 contracts would be bid out "immediately" while the rest "will wait for additional funds."

A defense official told Reuters the government planned to spend P30 billion in the six years from 2006 to upgrade the military's internal security operations capabilities.

Basic equipment such as helicopters, trucks, rifles, radios and smaller boats were programmed for acquisition until 2012.

About P60 billion to buy equipment for the Air Force and Navy is allocated for 2012 to 2018 and P120 billion to modernize equipment would be spent on the third and last six-year period until 2024.

With a report from Reuters

FLASHING THE NO. 1 sign, the members of the United Opposition hold a meeting at the Club Filipino, Greenhills, San Juan to, among other thing left, front, former Agrarian Reform Secretary Horacio Morales, ex-Sen. Nikki Coseteng, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, ex-Ser

May election Round 3 of Gloria

From page A1

Defensor, who has made no secret of his plan to seek a Senate seat, also said the senatorial polls should not be seen as black versus white, as the opposition would want.

"They accuse this government of corruption and failure to uphold good governance. But the Estrada administration itself was not a model of honesty and good governance," he said.

He also said the public would "see through" the candidates queuing for Estrada's endorsement: "Some of them were actually those who led in ousting Estrada, and now they are siding with him just to win an election."

Indeed, the United Opposition (UNO)—largely composed of Estrada's Partido ng Masang Pilipino and PDP-Laban—is prioritizing adherence to a simple platform of government.

"[The candidates] must conform with [our] anti-GMA platform," Makati Mayor and UNO chair Jejomar Binay said at a meeting of the coalition yesterday.

Binay declined to announce UNO's senatorial candidates, saying that discussions were still ongoing and that the list would be finalized possibly next week.

He said the screening process was "very democratic" and involved several leaders of the group.

On own strengths

Defensor said that when the battle lines had been clearly drawn, voters were likely to vote for candidates singly and not as a team.

"Administration candidates will win largely on their own strengths and not on team support," he said.

He cited Senators Mar Roxas and Pia Cayetano, who were among the top vote-getters in the 2004 polls—the result, he said, of their individual strengths and successful campaign strategy.

Apparently, not only Defensor but also other members of the Cabinet are planning to run.

Or at least this was what Defensor told reporters, saying he had heard the names of Tourism Secretary Ace Durano, Health Secretary Francisco Duque and Tesda chief Augusto Syjuco "mentioned" for possible inclusion in the administration slate.

"Their names have been floated," he said at a press briefing.

And while he had not personally spoken with his three colleagues about their supposed candidacy, he said he had not heard them deny it either.

But Duque expressed surprise about the matter in a phone interview with the INQUIRER in Dagupan City.

"I don't know. I will have to assess the situation first," he said. "Will I be able to help the President better by being a senator or a health secretary?"

Other possible bets

Defensor said that according to Gabriel Claudio, the President's political adviser, the administration had yet to complete the slate.

He said the administration's other possible senatorial candidates were Representatives Miguel Zubiri, Prospero Nograles, Prospero Pichay and Gilbert Teodoro.

Anyone from show biz? Defensor said

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New York City hails 'Subway Superman'

From page A1

Hollopeter convulsing on the tracks. As he watched, he thought: "I'm the only one to do it."

He eyed the trough between the rails before jumping on top of the teenager, Autrey said, and relied on his experience as a construction worker used to "confined spaces" to calculate—in split seconds—that "maybe we have enough clearance."

Before jumping, he said he made sure his daughters were OK and asked two women to hold their hands.

The southbound train grazed the top of his hat. He said he and Hollopeter remained there for 20 minutes while MTA workers shut off the third rail.

Doing the right thing

"What I did was something any and every New Yorker should do: If you see someone in distress do the right thing—help out."

In a statement on Thursday, the family of Hollopeter, said Autrey "deserves all of the attention and the accolades that are now being bestowed upon him."

While Bloomberg called Autrey "the hero of Harlem" and the New York Post newspaper dubbed him the "Subway Superman," the construction worker said the real heroes were US troops in Iraq.

Autrey refused medical attention—and then went to work after the incident. His boss didn't believe his excuse for being late to work until he saw on the Internet what Autrey had done. Autrey said his boss bought him a "hero" sandwich.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority Executive Director Elliot Sander called Autrey's action "a death-defying act of bravery. We truly have not seen anything like this .. He was at the right place at the right time and did the right thing."

Free rides, cash award

Along with the civic award, Autrey was also given a year's worth of free rides on New York's subway and buses, then met with real estate mogul Donald Trump, who gave him a $10,000-check, along with two other checks from undisclosed donors.

The Walt Disney Co. gave Autrey and his family a one-week fully paid trip to the Disney World theme park in Orlando, Florida, and tickets to the Broadway smash hit musical "The Lion King."

The New York Film Academy, where Hollopeter studies, said it had given Autrey $5,000 and offered scholarships to his daughters, while The New York Daily News reported Autrey had been offered a television show apartment makeover.

Autrey is also scheduled to appear on both "The Late Show With David Letterman" and "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

No better way to start '07

"Good things happen when you do good," Autrey said. "What better way to start a new year than saving a life?"

Autrey said he had visited Hollopeter in hospital and met the young man's father.

Previous recipients of New York's Bronze Medallion include civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Muhammad Ali and baseball legend Willie Mays. The last recipient was Housing Authority employee Felix Vasquez, who caught a baby thrown from a burning New York City building in 2005.

Reuters, AP

"HERO OF HARLEM," Wesley Autrey at New York's City Hall on Thursday receives the Bronze Medallion from Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Previous recipients of the award were Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali. AP

Terror alert

From page A1

Cruz, however, brushed aside the warnings of some "Western countries," saying that "when it comes to issues of security, we cannot compare the threshold of Filipinos with that of other countries."

"We view things differently," he said, noting that no such warnings came from the country's Asean partners.

President Macapagal-Arroyo said authorities were taking the warnings seriously but insisted that the summit would go ahead.

"We have faced some challenges before in the hosting of international events but for this particular summit we believe that we could hold it at its proposed site in Cebu," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, the President's spokesperson.

After being heavily criticized for last month's cancellation, the President hopes to restore the country's pride, urging all Filipinos to put their "best foot forward" during the week of the summit in Cebu.

"It is a moment of pride for all Filipinos who have shown our excellence worldwide and are called once more to put their best foot forward at this historic moment," the President said in a speech during her annual New Year's visit with military leaders at their Camp Aguinaldo headquarters yesterday.

Philippine showcase

The President said she wanted to showcase a "new Philippines" when it plays host to Asean and East Asian countries.

"We should mark this as our contribution to a safer and more prosperous world," she said.

"The agreements that I expect to be signed will be a collective harbinger of greater stability, cooperation and people-to-people efforts reaching out to achieve greater freedom from fear and freedom from want in the fastest growing regions of the world," Ms Arroyo said.

Matthew Lussenhop, first secretary and spokesperson for the US embassy in Manila, said the US had dropped its travel advisory on Cebu although it maintains a "general travel warning" for the Philippines.

He would give no further details.

Bishops give scathing review to best picture

From page A1

ture in the recent Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF).

The author of the acerbic review is the Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation (Cinema), the film body of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

"Enteng Kabisote 3," a fantasy movie and the latest installment of a yearly MMFF blockbuster, got a two-dot rating in moral assessment in the Cinema review dated Jan. 4.

The two-dot rating means "disturbing," which is a notch higher than "abhorrent."

Neither did the movie fare well in the technical aspect, with the CBCP film body giving it a three-star rating or the equivalent of "average."

'Extended Eat Bulaga'

And when it came to the storyline, Cinema, a panel of film reviewers under the CBCP's Office on Women, said: "It was not based on logic, so don't be surprised if it leads nowhere..."

"And don't go looking for good acting or an intelligent script because neither [can be found in] the film," the film body added in Filipino.

The Catholic critics described the movie as an "extended" version of "Eat Bulaga," the noontime, TV variety show featuring the same group of celebrities, including Vic Sotto who plays Enteng, the lead role.

Cinema said the movie teemed with computer-generated effects, but was nowhere near "Harry Potter" or "Lord of the Rings" in terms of quality.

"Even if they say the movie has sense because it shows the battle between good and evil... its message was blurred by a concoction of slapstick humor, poor martial arts, and brainless comedy," the film body said.

One roast chicken

How did such a bad film get top honors in the MMFF? the critics wondered.

Cinema said viewers need not look far. One criteria—a whopping 40 percent—for best picture was "commercial viability."

"You now understand why the crown went to this movie," the CBCP film body said. "How can the film industry rise when a movie's excellence is based on how much it can attract money?"

The Catholic critics lamented that a mix of comedy and fantasy was the "formula that appeals to the Filipino taste."

"Are you willing to spend hard-earned money just to get bored in the cinema?" the group asked the public and listed far better ways to spend P140, which is the usual price of a movie ticket.

"You can buy so many things with your P140—six kilos of rice, one roast chicken, 14 sticks of barbecue, or a kilo of grapes," the CBCP film body said.

The INQUIRER asked Sotto, lead star and coproducer of "Enteng," for a reaction on the CBCP review, but all he said via text message was "No comment."

Orly Ilacad, executive producer of "Enteng" told the INQUIRER in a phone interview: "The box-office result speaks for itself. The people decide what they want to watch and the mere fact that it's still No. 1 at the tills means that what we're offering them is worth their time."

Ilacad stressed that the CBCP should have taken note of the underlying message of the movie: "That good always triumphs over evil."

He said the film's only goal "is to entertain... and we believe we passed the jurors' criteria. We were not the ones who voted; we are only recipients of the award."

Malou Choa-Fagar, executive-in-charge of production for "Eat Bulaga," said she understood the CBCP review, "but they shouldn't hit 'Enteng' because it didn't ask for the award. They should complain to the MMFF."

She added: "Maybe the reason the CBCP said 'Enteng' is an expanded version of 'Eat Bulaga' is because our stars guested in the movie. Anyway, that's the CBCP's opinion."

Everything in order

Bayani Fernando, chair of the Metro Manila Development Authority (which spearheads the MMFF), said he had not read the CBCP's review and declined to comment.

As for the negative comments against "Enteng," as best picture winner, Fernando said via phone interview: "Everyone has his or her own opinion ... I stand by the decision of the board of jurors. It's composed of 11 people, including two National Artists."

He added that he had reviewed "the evaluation reports of the jurors, and the ballots as tabulated by the [accounting firm] SGV (SyCip Gorres Velayo & Co.), and found that everything was in order. I can vouch for the results."

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, start drawing up its senatorial slate and its campaign platform, which seems to be for "anything anti-GMA." From . Ernesto Maceda and Rep. Ronnie Zamora. RAFFY LERMA

vs Erap fight

nzano, chair of the Optical was a possibility.

ncumbent senators seeking fensor surmised that ex- s were being conducted resident Manuel Villar and r Arroyo, Ralph Recto and nan.

under the administration 01.

idates

y to UNO's ongoing meet- least eight opposition lead- is "sure" candidates.

ine others were still being that the following were as- former Senators Loren ic Sotto III, Teofisto Guingo- er Vice President), and even ngo" Honasan; San Juan cito, one of Estrada's sons; Allan Peter Cayetano and ro, and lawyer Aquilino Pi- of the incumbent senator. sedly still being considered maining slots are Senators Villar, Pangilinan, Recto and Panfilo Lacson; former Senators Tessie Oreta and John Osmena; actor Richard Gomez; Rep. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, and even Antonio Trillanes, a leader of the Magdalo group that mounted the foiled mutiny of 2003.

But Binay neither confirmed nor denied the list. He said with a smile that nothing was final.

Former Sen. Ernesto Maceda had earlier said he was no longer in the running and would give way to others.

He said more than 30 personalities had approached UNO asking that they be included in the slate.

Talks are also supposedly ongoing with leaders of the Nacionalista Party and the Liberal Party for a possible coalition.

Binay said UNO would apply for accreditation at the Commission on Elections as the dominant opposition party.

House bets to ensure GMA impeach

As such, it will be entitled to a copy of the election returns during canvassing.

Binay also said UNO had started talks with prospective candidates for seats in the House of Representatives.

According to former Rep. JV Bautista of the Sanlakas party-list group, winning at least a third of the total congressional slots would enable the political opposition to ensure the impeachment of Ms Arroyo.

"The elections this year are really about whether to allow Ms Arroyo to rule in the next three years or beyond, or to oust her this year," Bautista said.

Binay said the focus was on fielding strong candidates for the House.

"We are also considering asking our congressional candidates to sign a covenant saying they would sign an impeachment complaint against [the President]," he said, adding:

"This would not completely guarantee their loyalty, but at least something will bother their conscience."

Lacking the numbers, opposition lawmakers had twice tried but failed to impeach Ms Arroyo. *With reports from Christine O. Avendaño in Manila, and Gabriel Cardinoza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

RP geologists rock, mines study shows

From page A1

lion (pegged at slightly lower than current metal prices)," it continued.

That, "indeed, is a very significant contribution from such a small force," said one of the authors, Ciceron Angeles Jr., who presented the study yesterday in a forum at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

By "small force," Angeles, a mine exploration manager connected with Central China Goldfields Plc, was referring to roughly 1,000 active Filipino geologists here and abroad.

The small number of Filipino geologists, he said, was disproportionate to their huge contributions to "worldwide economies since 1980."

Across 3 continents

The study reported that the mineral discoveries were spread across three continents: 12 each in the Philippines and Indonesia, five in Saudi Arabia, and two each in South Korea and Mongolia.

One discovery each was also made in Australia, Chile, China, Guyana, Laos, Malaysia and Burma (Myanmar).

A recent overseas discovery was in Laos in 1996, yielding 121 tons of gold and 1.9 million tons of copper, amounting to $13.35 billion (P651 billion), the study said.

The Filipinos who contributed to the exploration in varying capacities were Joel Aquino, William Bondame and Hernulfo Ruelo.

Filipino edge

Between 2002 and 2003, a Filipino named Augusto Flores was one of the discoverers of a goldmine in Guyana. The find produced some 62 tons of gold worth $1 billion (P48.8 billion).

Angeles said he himself had led one such exploration for a previous employer in Indonesia in the late 1990s, which yielded 17 tons of gold worth more than $279 million (P13.6 billion)

In that exploration, his team included an American, two Britons and an Indonesian, said Angeles, president of Iuvenus Orbis Inc., the forum organizer.

Since then, he has led other mine explorations in which he has had to decide between hiring Filipinos and other nationals.

"Filipinos have an edge, not only because technically, they're very good, they're also culturally sensitive. And they speak good English," Angeles said.

"[In contrast] it takes a lot of adjusting for [someone used to working in] London to work in Third World conditions," he added.

J. Paul McKibben, an Australian trustee of the Philippine Mineral Exploration Association, vouched for the Filipinos' skills in the geological sciences.

World-class

"You have world-class geologists. You can compete anywhere," he said in the same forum.

The study noted that a fourth of Filipino geoscientists here and abroad were employed in managerial positions, either as project to country-level managers or chief geologists.

The study was the result of an informal survey of Filipino geoscientists mostly through e-mail correspondence, cross-referenced with public data on mineral deposits, as well as experts on the mineral deposits who were present during the discoveries.

Despite the accomplishments of Filipino geologists in the global minerals industry, there is much to be done to revitalize the profession in the country, Angeles said.

Scholarships, jobs

McKibben said there should be closer coordination between academe and industry.

"Since employers need graduates, we should help colleges produce them," he said.

Such a collaboration could take the form of scholarships for students and job opportunities for graduates, he said.

Ma. Ines Rosanna Balangue-Tarriela of the UP National Institute of Geological Sciences pointed out that since 2000, the number of geology freshmen ranged from 15 to 25.

"Of this number, very few actually picked geology as their first choice," she said.

She suggested ways to encourage students to take up geology by offering more scholarships and relaxing some of the academic requirements.

Promote awareness

"A more permanent solution is to promote geoscience awareness to the general public and to encourage other universities to offer geology as a course," she said.

Benjamin Philip Romualdez, president of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines and Benguet Corp., said a fresh geology graduate from Australia with a license could earn up to Australian $80,000 (P3 million) a year.

"There's a demand but there are not enough geologists... so companies are always pirating people," Romualdez observed.

"That's why whenever one of my people gets invited to forums [like this], I get nervous. I can't be sure if he'll come back," he said, drawing laughter from the audience.

, yes but no rain on Asean parade

However, the Canadian government warned terrorists were in the final stages of planning attacks.

Canada's warning

"Following the announcement that the previously postponed Asean [meeting] will now be held in Cebu in January, there is a renewed threat of terrorism," the Canadian government said on its website.

"Credible information suggests terrorists are in the final stages of planning attacks," it said. Its embassy reaffirmed the warning to Agence France Presse yesterday.

"It has been posted on our website for several weeks now. The only amendment was made when the new dates [for the summit] were advised by the Philippine government," Steven Rheault-Kihara, political and economic counselor with the embassy, told AFP without elaborating.

One diplomatic source, who did not want to be identified, said: "It's better to err on the side of caution. The summit itself is not in any danger, but there are groups out there who may want to make their presence felt and embarrass the government at the same time."

The Australian embassy said yesterday it was maintaining its warning that information suggested terrorists were in the final stages of planning an attack, but declined to comment further.

In Sydney, a spokesperson for Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trade Minister Warren Truss would be attending the summit, in lieu of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. The spokesperson did not say why Downer, who had been slated to attend the canceled summit in Cebu last month, would not attend.

The British embassy is also keeping its advisory but could not be contacted for comment.

No direct threat

"There is no direct threat. Based on intelligence information, there is no validated threat [from terrorists]," said the Armed Forces public information chief Lt. Col. Bartolome Bacarro said.

He said that if there was a threat, it would be from leftist activists who are expected to stage protest rallies at the site.

The military last month deployed about 5,000 troops to augment the 7,000 policemen assigned to secure the summit. The troops are still in Cebu.

Apart from the Vietnamese-American terrorist, the Philippines is hunting other militants thought to be hiding in the archipelago.

The Abu Sayyaf kidnap terror gang which has carried out the worst terror attacks in the Philippines reportedly has ties with the al-Qaida terror network of Osama bin Laden.

Trapped in Sulu

Hundreds of Filipino troops, with assistance from the United States, have also been searching for two members of the Jemaah Islamiya group, key suspects in the 2002 Bali bombings that killed about 200 people.

A senior military commander said the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah groups did not pose a threat to the Asean summit.

Lt. Gen. Eugenio Cedo, chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Mindanao Command, said the two groups which have staged bomb attacks here and in Indonesia were trapped in Sulu province where the military has been pursuing them relentlessly for the past five months.

"They [the terrorist groups] cannot slip out [of Sulu] because they are not accepted in other areas," Cedo told reporters yesterday.

"The Asean summit is secure," he said.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. South Korea, Japan, China, India, Australia and New Zealand are its dialogue partners. *With reports from Dona Pazzibugan, AFP and AP*

Viet terrorist hunted

AUTHORITIES YESTERDAY launched a nationwide manhunt for an alleged Vietnamese-American terrorist who could pose a threat to leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and their East Asian dialogue partners during their summit in Cebu City next week.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said police were attempting to find fugitive Vihn Nguyen Tan before the 12th Summit of Leaders of Asean, scheduled for Jan. 10 to Jan. 15, amid a warning from Canada of a possible terror attack.

The summit was to have been held in Cebu in December but was postponed after Canada as well as Britain, Australia and the United States warned of terror threats. The official reason cited for the postponement was an oncoming typhoon that eventually spared Cebu.

"In view of the uncertainty as to his whereabouts, it may be assumed that he has not left the Philippines and therefore poses a threat to the forthcoming Asean summit," Gonzalez said.

Tan, 51, who is also known as Vo Van Duc, is the alleged leader of the Free Vietnam Revolutionary Group.

Corrupt BI officials

He was arrested in Manila in 2001 while allegedly assembling a bomb for use in attacking the Vietnamese Embassy here.

He was convicted on charges of illegal possession of explosives and was serving a four-year sentence when in 2005 he was illegally freed by corrupt immigration officials who gave him a Filipino passport.

Efforts to locate him since have been futile, and three immigration officials are now being investigated for the fiasco.

Immigration officials "cannot state with clarity if Vo Van Duc really left the country," Gonzalez said.

Also wanted in Thailand

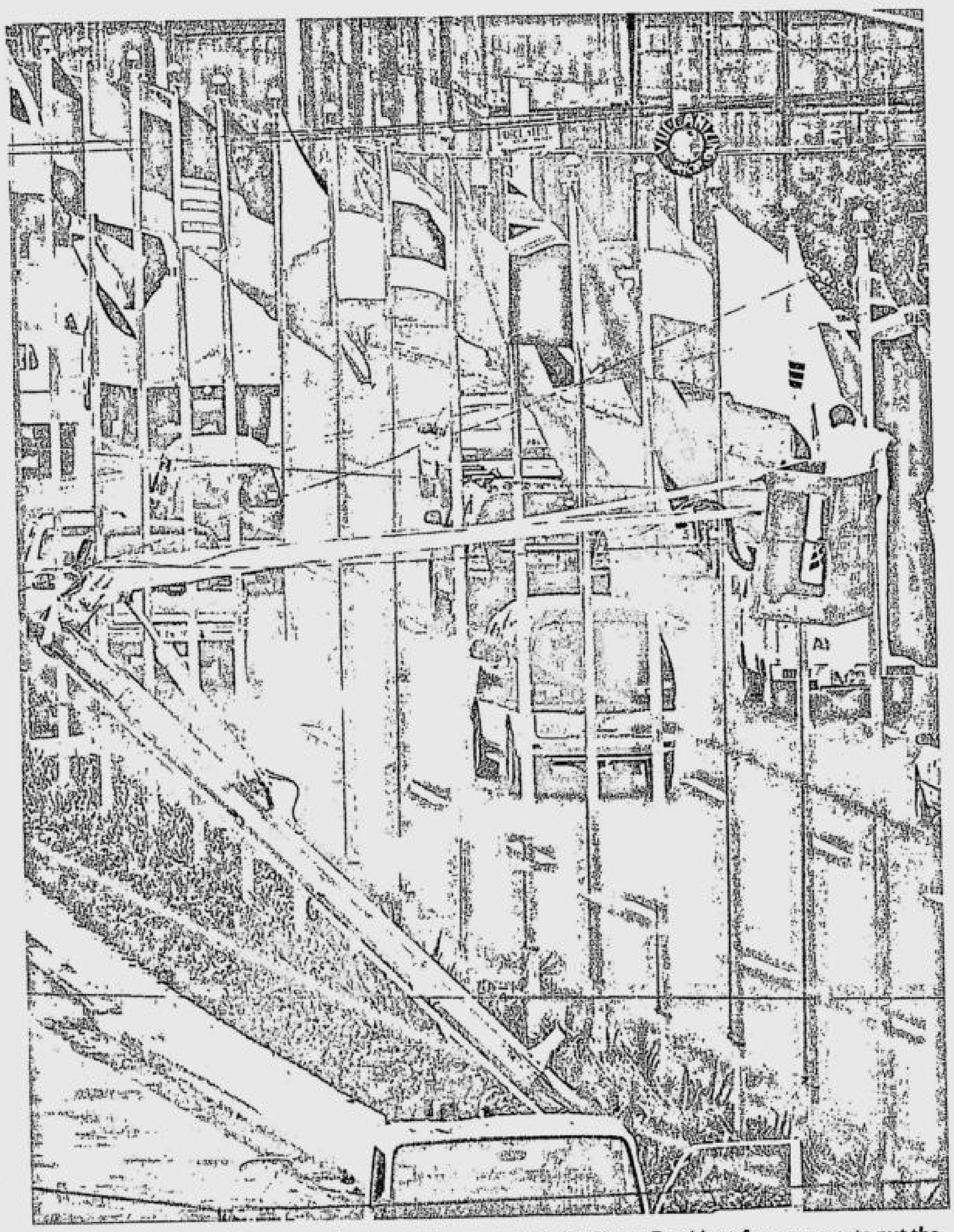
Gonzalez said Tan was also wanted in Thailand for a failed bombing of the Vietnamese Embassy there in 2001, as well as for an arson attack on Hanoi's mission in London in 2000.

Tan was born in South Vietnam, but records show his declared permanent address is in San Jose, California, Gonzalez said.

Days before the rescheduled summit, the justice department started moving against suspected high-profile terrorists, Tan being one of them.

Gonzalez, who has declared he would not allow militant groups to disturb the holding of the summit and threatened to feed them to the sharks, ordered National Bureau of Investigation Director Nestor M. Mantaring to hunt down Duc.

"As Vo Van Duc is a fugitive from justice, having evaded sentence of his service, no warrant of arrest is needed for his arrest," Gonzalez said in a memorandum. *AFP with Armand Nocum*



IT'S A GO: The flags of Asean member countries are up in Cebu City as President Arroyo vows to put the country's best foot forward a month after postponing the meeting of 10 leaders and their dialogue partners allegedly due to a typhoon which, however spared the summit venue. TONEE DESPOJO/CEBU DAILY NEWS

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Failure of nerve

EDITORIAL

EVEN THOUGH THERE IS MUCH TO PRAISE IN the reasoning behind the Court of Appeals decision on the Smith custody issue, the ruling itself was abrupt and flawed. Written with great confidence, the vigorously written decision sputtered at the end, self-evidently having lost its nerve.

The result is a new gloss on a famous saying: victory has a thousand fathers, yes, but ambiguous legal victory sires a million children. That is why everyone involved in the issue, including the government officials whose contradictory behavior puzzled the justices in the appellate court's special 16th division, now claims to have found vindication in the court's decision.

Did the court in fact uphold the controversial—and in our view, patently illegal—transfer of custody of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, the convicted rapist in the Subic case? No. It only took judicial cognizance of the transfer. Because Smith had in fact already been transferred, from the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy, the court ruled that Smith's custody petition was moot.

The appellate court used a rather fine distinction made by the great US Supreme Court justice, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., to justify its decision "to consider the matter treated in the petition moot." Holmes, a famous advocate of judicial self-restraint, had once written: "The other branches of the Government are ultimate guardians of the liberties and welfare of the people in quite as great a degree as the courts." Yes, quite. But what happens when the other branches—or in this case the executive alone—fail their responsibility as ultimate guardians? The underlying issue in the Smith custody case, it seems to us, is the unconscionable decision of the executive to effect a transfer of custody without waiting for a court order.

As Undersecretary Zosimo Paredes, the often-criticized official responsible for overseeing the Visiting Forces Agreement, correctly said yesterday: The Palace took the law into its own hands. It had previously recognized that the custody issue was within the jurisdiction of the courts by filing the necessary pleadings. By effecting the transfer, stealthily and without a court order, the executive violated the law it was sworn to serve.

In other words, the age-old question was raised in the custody issue: Who will guard the guardians? We are sorry to see that the Court of Appeals failed to give the right republican answer: The other guardians.

We have reason to believe, however, that the court did in fact hear the question. Consider the following highlights of the decision:

The court could have simply junked Smith's motion for certiorari, but it did not: "Petitioner's resort to certiorari may be simply denied for non-compliance with the requirements of the rules. But, we go further in view of the far-reaching consequences of the core issue vis-à-vis the VFA that has been brought to the fore." In other words, it thought the case was important enough to make an exception.

The court saw—or rather, saw through—the essential character of the VFA. "The VFA is not about protecting soldiers from any harm. It is all about containing and restraining visiting soldiers from causing damage and injury to the host country." In other words, the VFA was not "a legal shield."

The court noted the irony of the administration's shifting position on custody: the government "did not share the views of the US Embassy as well as the petitioner regarding custody, except only until lately; that is; after the respondent judge adjudged the petitioner guilty of committing rape beyond reasonable doubt." In other words, we fought for custody of the accused but not of the convicted.

The court also zeroed in on Smith's self-serving argument about the meaning of "all judicial proceedings," thus: "We have here a petitioner who says judicial proceedings mean from trial all the way to completion of appeal when arguing for custody by US authorities and says another, that judicial proceedings mean trial court proceedings only when arguing the meaning of the one-year time line." In other words, Smith and his lawyers are playing us for a fool.

All these and more—and then a bizarre twist at the end, a failure of nerve disguised as a graceless curtsey to diplomacy. We are sorry to see the Court of Appeals go so far, only to come up short.

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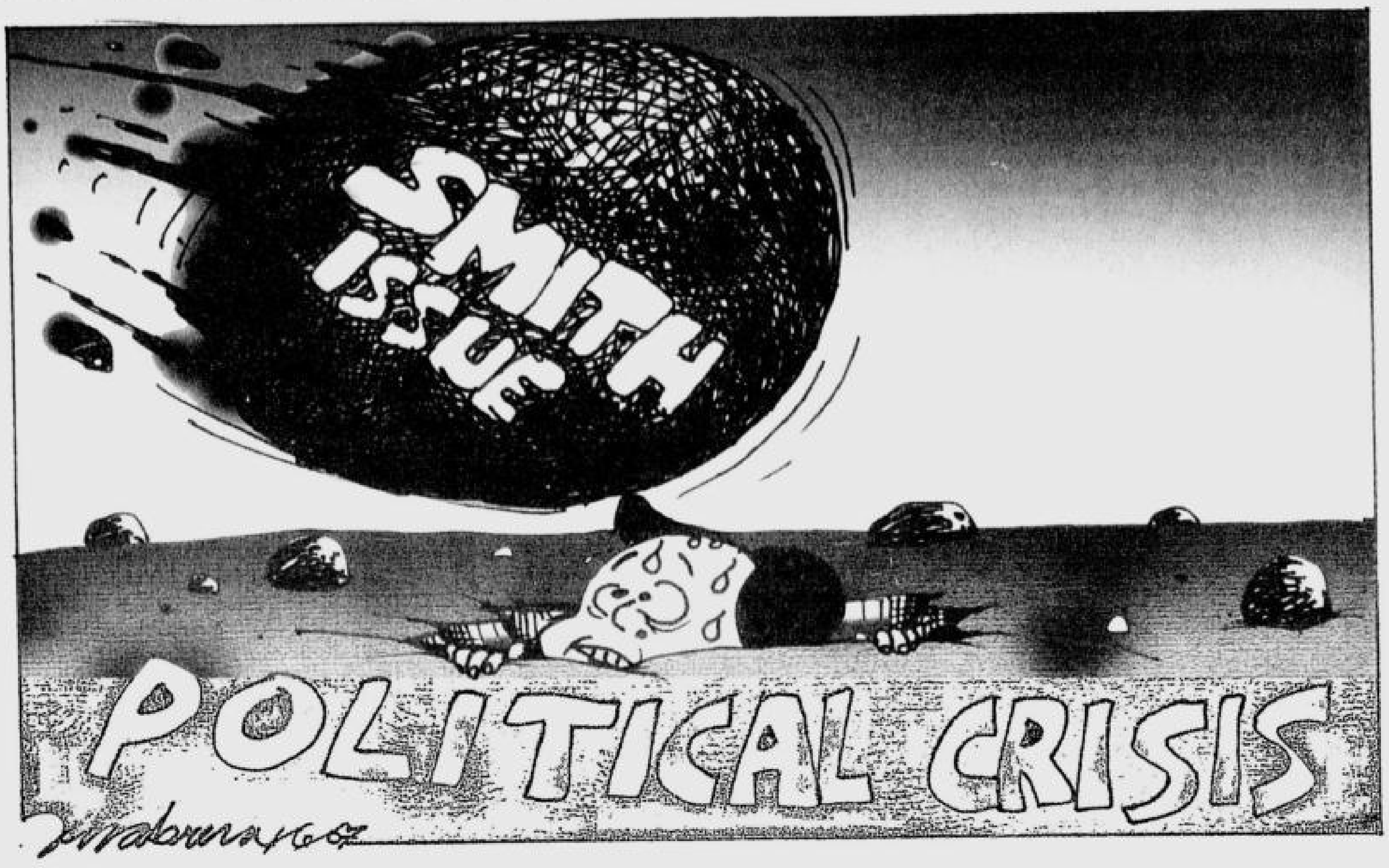

A not impossible dream

SEPARATE OPINION

Isagani A. Cruz

THIS NEW YEAR IS LIKELY TO SEE A renewal of the efforts to amend, or better still, revise the present Constitution. It is hoped that they will succeed this time. After all, the charter will be 20 years in February and its operation during all that time has revealed many imperfections that need to be corrected.

The common impression is that the Constitution is not a mere statute that may be changed by another statute in the discretion or even the caprice of the legislature. It is supposed to be a permanent document to be preserved and protected "amidst the strife of storms."

But the virtue of permanence may at the same time be a disadvantage where the Constitution is unable to adjust to the need for change justified by new conditions and circumstances or as indicated by instructive experience.

In the case of the Constitution of 1987, we have discovered many of its shortcomings that need to be rectified. There is, moreover, an insistent demand to change it based not only upon such need but to suit the personal ambitions of selfish leaders seeking to retain their powers and prerogatives under a new charter.

Two of the prescribed methods to rewrite the Constitution have already been tried and failed. In 1997 and later last year, the initiative was outlawed by the Supreme Court. The separate cases of Santiago, Pirma and Lambino, all against the Commission on Elections, proved its undoing. Its proponents are reportedly going to renew it, but its chances are pretty slim.

The second method, facetiously called the Con-ass, also failed disgracefully last month. The House of Representatives, through the illegal amendment of its own rules, tried to convert Congress into a constituent assembly but without the Senate. The scheme was booted out, not by the high court but by the scandalized people.

The third and only remaining method is the calling of a constitutional convention by a majority vote of all the members of Congress. This time it will probably be agreed that the majority vote shall be taken separately by the two chambers instead of being based on the totality of all the members of Congress voting jointly.

If this call materializes, I hope the implementing statute will insure, or at least attempt to insure, a competent body composed of intelligent delegates moved by an apolitical or nonpartisan desire to frame a new Constitution more adapted to the present times and responsive to our current problems in this computer age.

The envisioned constitutional convention shall be elective and not appointive like the Constitutional Commission of 1986. That body was composed of delegates chosen carefully by President Corazon Aquino on the strength of their acknowledged virtues of integrity and intelligence, best personified by its president, former Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma.

In contrast, the Constitutional Conventions of 1935 and 1971 consisted of elected members. Some of them, especially those in the first body, were established political leaders like Claro M. Recto, Jose P. Laurel and Manuel A. Roxas. The second body was presided over first by Carlos P. Garcia and then by Diosdado Macapagal, both former presidents of the Philippines.

The Constitutions drafted by all three bodies, while generally creditable, had their separate defects, being human handiworks and therefore far from perfect. The Constitution of 1935 was drafted while we were still a colony of the United States and therefore subject to its control. The original 1972 Constitution was mangled by Marcos during his dictatorship. And the major objection to the present 1987 Constitution is that it was framed by delegates who were not chosen directly by the people.

If the plan to call a constitutional convention pulls through, I hope Congress will take special patriotic care in requiring appropriate qualifications for its elective delegates. In my humble view, they should indispensably be possessed of academic or educational qualifications like appointive officials and even minor employees under the present and previous charters.

This should prevent the intrusion into the future constitutional convention of incompetents from ignorant political dynasties, entertainers in public office whose only credential is their popularity in the box office, and scalawags elected through guns and gold whose only function in the government is to misappropriate the pork barrel.

I know I may be pining for castles in the air, but it is not an impossible dream. It was possible decades before the present government which is a maelstrom of corruption, ineptness and plain stupidity. It is so different from the more serene years when the people could rely on the public officials as their protectors in the common effort to promote the welfare and future of the nation.

I hope the leaders of this apparently hopeless regime will divest themselves of all the avarice that has imprisoned our suffering country in their tenacious clutch for power and plunder. It is we, the people, who can release ourselves from their rapacity and confidently approach a better future in this new year of 2007.

The worst of all possible worlds

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

I UNDERSTAND FROM MY UP COLLEAGUE Rene Azurin that another instance of political legerdemain occurred in Congress a couple of weeks ago, when the House of Representatives reportedly voted, 153-0, to pass a bill mandating a national P125 increase in the minimum daily wage. Azurin says that only 19 of our congresspersons were present that afternoon, when the bill was reportedly voted on. Neat, huh? 19 becomes 153.

These numbers notwithstanding, one can only surmise that our congresspersons "voted" that way to increase their chances for reelection. To anybody who thinks that it was done to improve workers' welfare, banish the thought. Because equating a minimum wage, or its increase, with improving the welfare of workers is like saying that 19 is equal to 153.

Here's how it works. A legislated minimum wage as a "floor" price is by definition higher than the market-clearing or equilibrium wage. If it were equal to or lower than the equilibrium price, it would be superfluous.

Will there be those who will benefit from the higher minimum wage rate? Yes. The workers who can retain their jobs at the higher wage rates will obviously benefit.

But that doesn't mean that **all** workers will benefit. It must be remembered that wage and salary workers comprise only half of the employed labor force. The other half are the self-employed (own-account) and those who are unpaid family workers. An increase in the minimum wage is not going to increase the income of self-employed farmers, fisherfolk, vendors, etc.

And there will be direct losers from the higher minimum wage. For starters, the workers who were working at the previous wage rate, but who will lose their jobs because their employers can no longer afford the higher wages. Add to that number those who were previously not looking for work (because they consider the wages too low), but are now actively looking for jobs that are unfortunately unavailable at the higher wage. How beneficial is a higher minimum wage if they cannot find work?

Can it be arranged that the winners at this wage game will compensate the losers? Unlikely. Even if that were possible, it is still not sure that waged labor as a whole will benefit, in the sense of a larger wage bill, or the share of wages in national income. Because if the demand for unskilled labor at that price range is elastic, the effect of a higher wage rate will be overwhelmed by the effect of the decreases in number of employed.

That is still not the complete picture. The 50 percent of the employed labor force who are not wage earners, as pointed out above, will not only not benefit from the increase in the minimum wage, they might even lose. Why? Because a wage increase will surely put upward pressure on the prices of goods—which means that the real income of the self-employed and the unpaid family workers will go down—they will be able to buy less goods, with their unchanged income, than before.

The same negative effect will be felt by fixed income earners—the retirees with fixed pensions or families who depend on an overseas worker's fixed income, even government employees, who are not covered by the minimum wage law.

And finally, one has to take account of the effect of this minimum wage increase on the currently unemployed (as distinguished from those who might lose their jobs, or those who weren't looking for work before, but will now enter the labor market) numbering from 2.6 million to 3.7 million people, depending on whether we are using the new or old definition. They have no income at all, and will be faced with rising prices and poorer prospects of employment.

Not a pretty picture. And definitely not one that can be described as beneficial to Philippine labor.

Yet, this is being pushed by those who claim to have the interests of the laborers in their warm hearts. If that is the case, then they unfortunately also have warm heads because they cannot see that their so-called solution can give rise to problems that will hurt laborers more.

And please. Spare us the argument that this increase is needed as the minimum wage is not enough for a worker to support a family of six, or words to that effect. In the interests of accuracy, there are, on the average, two workers per family (33 million workers, roughly 16.5 million families)—not just one, as is assumed. This argument also erroneously assumes that all workers are wage workers, and worse, that all will be able to keep their jobs even if the wage rate is increased.

If we want workers' incomes to increase—and who doesn't?—the ultimate solution is by increasing the demand for labor, or decreasing the supply of labor, or some combination of both. In turn, this means increasing skills, education, training (on the demand side) and family planning (on the supply side).

For the short and medium term, if wages are to be set, collective bargaining between labor and management at the firm level would be the preferred option, with government coming in if there is asymmetry in information or other market failures. Failing that, industry-level wage setting, and even regional-level wage setting, would be the next best.

The worst of all possible worlds, given the huge socio-economic disparities in the Philippines, is wage setting at the national level. And that's what the House of Representatives wants.

One can only hope that the cooler heads in the Senate will prevail.

Defective VFA should be honored

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

REP. ANTONIO CUENCO, CHAIR OF THE HOUSE committee on foreign relations and co-chair of the Legislative Oversight Committee on the VFA, said the House would review some of the ambiguous provisions in the VFA. This is in order, if we are to avoid the horrible dilemma these provisions have caused. Actually it would be more suitable for the Senate to review them, as it's the chamber vested by the Constitution with treaty-ratifying powers. It ratified the VFA that was signed by the executive branch under Joseph Estrada in 1999, ambiguities and all. Now the Senate has largely been quiet about the Smith controversy, acting as though it isn't the main culprit.

* * *

Bohol Rep. Eladio Jala, chair of the House committee on government enterprises, who's supporting the Cuenco proposal, was right in rapping the senators who argue for a return of Smith to government's custody. Jala noted that among them is Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, who, as Senate defense committee chair, was a co-sponsor of the VFA at that time. Considering all the legal luminaries in the Senate at that time, it's ironic that they had to come out with such a defective treaty. To this Charter change advocate, the shoddy work of the Senate in this instance, as well as Congress' failure to pass the 2006 budget, are additional arguments that we don't need a bicameral legislature. But defective or not, as long as the VFA is in force, the Philippines has to honor its commitments under the treaty. This is the honorable thing to do.

* * *

As the old year ended, the Supreme Court issued a landmark decision that condemned, in the strongest terms possible, the destruction of the environment. It also drove home the urgent message that all of us Filipinos have an important role to play in conserving our forests and thereby protecting human lives. In a 58-page ruling written by Justice Minita Chico-Nazario, the Court threw out the petition filed by the Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines (Picop), the country's biggest logging concession, to automatically convert its Timber License Agreement (TLA) No. 43 into an "Integrated Forest Management Agreement" (Ifma). The Court thus reversed the Court of Appeals and the Quezon City Regional Trial Court, both of which had favored automatic conversion.

* * *

The high court's decision vindicates former Environment Secretary Heherson Alvarez, who was sacked for, among other decisions, refusing this automatic conversion for Picop, which was backed by some very powerful politicians. Alvarez has been scoring a series of court victories recently for his populist moves against powerful vested interests during his two-year term at the DENR. These include his decision to carve out a reservation for small miners in Mt. Diwalwal in order to protect their rights against the big miners and to preserve the ancestral lands of the B'laans of Mindanao from encroachment by big business.

* * *

To appreciate the significance of the recent high court decision, it should be noted that the 1987 Constitution banned the issuance of these Marcos-regime TLAs. In its place the DENR came up with the Ifma, an instrument that installed safeguards for logging operations, such as tree planting and the use of sustainable forest management practices. Picop's TLA No. 43, which covers 75,545 hectares of forests in four provinces of Eastern Mindanao, expired in April 2002 and instead of seeking renewal, the firm sought to convert it into an Ifma. Alvarez, however, refused to act on it until Picop first paid the government P167.5 million in unpaid forest charges as of August 2002 and complied with other requirements of law. At that time, the TLA was also found to overlap on ancestral lands of the Manobos, and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) also refused to grant Picop the needed clearances. It was also found to encroach on an 8,100 ha. mineral reservation set aside by President Macapagal-Arroyo in 2002.

* * *

The Supreme Court overruled the trial court and the Court of Appeals and upheld Alvarez by compelling Picop to pay its unpaid forest charges of P167.5 million to the government. It was also ordered to conduct and carry out a five-year forest protection and a seven-year reforestation plan, and to seek clearances from the NCIP and LGUs concerned. The Court also junked the RTC order that Alvarez pay Picop the P190 million it claimed in lost income owing to its non-operation. The Court's ruling comes at a time after a lot of environmental havoc was caused by three supertyphoons as well as massive flooding and mudslides in Quezon, Leyte, Surigao and Rizal. Said the high court: "The courts should not condone such blatant disregard by those who believe they are above the law because of their sizable investments and significant number of workers employed." Stressing that Picop has only itself to blame for the withholding of the conversion of its TLA, it said that "The judicial policy of nurturing prosperity would be better served by granting such concessions to someone who will abide by the law."

* * *

My friend Arlina Onglao, who runs "Journeys of Faith," is inviting this column's readers to a spiritual pilgrimage to the "Land of the Bible," from Feb. 1 to 14, which covers Egypt, Israel and Jordan. I'd strongly endorse this pilgrimage which my family did during Holy Year 2000—one has to see the places where Christ had lived, worked and died at least once in one's lifetime. This two-week pilgrimage will be led by renowned Bible scholar and much sought-after recollection speaker Fr. Renato Jose Lopez, SSL, who was also our chaplain then. He will conduct prayers and reflections in each biblical site, in addition to saying daily Masses. "What better way to spend the post-Christmas period than to be in the actual place where Christ was born and raised?" says Arlina, guaranteeing "a time for introspection and reflection, away from the maddening crowd and just being with God who invites us all to 'Come away and rest awhile...'" Call her at 0917-814-8127 or 929-0144 or 55, or email: joinjourneys@gmail.com

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A country run by 'a little girl'

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

BESIDES THE SUBIC RAPE CASE, THERE IS ONE other case that tests our government's resolve to protect our interests, our sovereignty and uphold our laws.

The case of the Hoi Wan has received far less media attention and involved the fate of a shipload of Napoleon Wrasses, better known as "mameng," a rare, endangered, but tasty and very expensive fish. But the handling of the case and the reactions of Filipino officialdom call to mind many of the same issues that arose out of the rape of "Nicole" and the tug-of-war over Daniel Smith.

Interestingly, the World Wildlife Fund-Philippines' local representative Lory Tan tells me that most of the Tubbataha National Park rangers and officers, who spotted the vessel Hoi Wan, gave chase and arrested the crew and then discovered its precious cargo, were women.

Once again, as with the Subic rape case, it's women ranged against a whole slew of Filipino officials, most of them male, rushing to surrender our sovereignty to foreigners and turn over our patrimony, including our dignity and our natural resources, in exchange for foreign currency and the "friendship" of more powerful interests.

Commenting on these twin issues, a friend who's been following the exchange of information on our pagbabago e-group raged that "we have no sovereignty to speak of…I am so angry about this. We give away our natural resources to the Chinese and allow Filipinas to be raped with impunity."

He couldn't help but recall a recent movie, adding: "Sabi ni Borat, aside from Kazakhstan, all the other countries are run by little girls. *Anong bansa kaya ang tinutukoy niya* (What country was he referring to)?"

* * *

"PEOPLE have to speak up, and demand delivery of government services (and enforcement of our laws) for which we pay lots and lots of taxes. And if we have to show them how, then we must," asserts Tan.

Though he says that the bureaucracy "is chockful of individuals who are cowed into submission and do not have the capacity to stand up," Tan says one can find "good people" in government offices who were in fact "the sources feeding us information without hesitation."

It's "a long, hard swim against the current," as Tan puts it. "That is how salmon gets to breed and spawn. And, if in the end, we are beaten up and dying, at the very least, we have left behind a new generation that will carry the flame. They, too will swim against the current."

On that note, and in the spirit of "swimming against the current," here's a summary by Tan of the entire gamut of issues surrounding the Hoi Wan incident, including several disturbing questions to which he demands urgent answers.

* * *

BARELY 48 hours after the apprehension of Hoi Wan was reported in Puerto Princesa, a representative from the Chinese Embassy was there clamoring for its immediate release. At the time, Manila media did not even know about the incident. But the embassy official there demanded it be let go without delay, and even escorted out of Philippine waters by the Navy.

Kidnapping, they alleged. Arbitrary detention, they charged. Over and over again, the embassy official, as well as South Pacific Inter Marketing, laid on the legal and diplomatic pressure. Although the DFA officially denied it, sources from government offices involved in the arrest and processing reported intervention from officials of that department. Why the rush?

Now, the truth is beginning to emerge. They had everything to lose, and everything to hide.

Hoi Wan had no permits to buy fish, as they claim. They have no CITES import application with Hong Kong AFCD, although they claim to be registered there. They have no CITES permit or export application with the BFAR here in the Philippines either. And, if as they claimed on Palawan radio, the fish had come from Malaysia, they have no Malaysian CITES permit either. This shipment was completely illegal.

Hoi Wan officially left the Philippines on Dec. 3, after giving verbal notice on the phone. The vessel and crew never physically stopped at the Immigration office in Bonggao on its way out. Neither did it stop at Customs, the Coast Guard and Marina. Considering the fact that it was carrying live fish, specifically live Napoleon Wrasse, it bypassed the most important inspection of all—a visit to the Fisheries Office. Its exit papers were, at the very least, irregular. It had to get out as soon as possible, unnoticed.

* * *

TO MAKE things worse, it was arrested in the Sulu Sea, carrying its illegal cargo, more than two weeks AFTER it was supposed to have left the Philippines. What was it doing there? The vessel was clocked at a speed of 16 knots by the ranger team. Why did it take two weeks to get from Bonggao to Tubbataha? It should have been in Hong Kong by then. What happens to overstaying aliens?

South Pacific Inter Marketing, their Philippine agent is not registered with the SEC, nor with the DTI of ARMM. It is not legally registered under Philippine law. Considering the fact that in barely one shipment, it was carrying more than a million pesos worth of fish in its holds, would the Bureau of Internal Revenue want to check their book of accounts? How many trips had South Pacific Inter Marketing engineered to buy fish in Philippine waters? This operation is completely illegal.

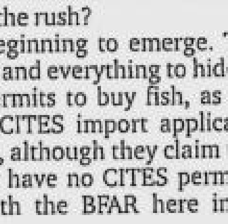
Why the rush? Clearly, many pockets were involved. And, many toes were going to get stepped on if the truth came out? Who had a motive to cover this up, and get the Hoi Wan out of the Philippines, as soon as possible?

Let me answer with a question: Who complained the loudest? Should these individuals be declared persona non grata? And who, in the Philippine government, did nothing to help bring the Hoi Wan and its crew to face the bar of justice?

Victors' justice, Iraqi-style

WORLD VIEW

Shlomo Avineri



SADDAM HUSSEIN IS DEAD, BUT NOT ALL Iraqis are celebrating. On the contrary, the way in which the various religious and ethnic groups in Iraq responded to his execution is emblematic of the difficulty of holding Iraq together as a coherent entity.

To the Shiite majority, long brutally oppressed by Saddam and all previous Sunni-dominated Iraqi regimes, his death symbolizes their attainment of political hegemony. Moreover, their triumphalist rejoicing is a cruel reminder that when the oppressed become liberated, they can very easily turn into oppressors themselves.

To the Sunni minority, pushed from power by the American invasion and giving vent to their frustration with daily attacks on the Shi'a population and their holy sites, Saddam will remain a hero for a long time to come. The Kurds, who, like the Shi'a, were victimized by Saddam for decades, quietly cling to their de facto independence in the north, making sure that they will never again come under Arab rule.

Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri el-Maliki, representing the ruling Shi'a-Kurdish coalition, expressed the hope that the dictator's end would help to heal the sectarian divides. But, however sincere his words may sound, reality is moving in the opposite direction, and the ugly verbal exchanges surrounding the act of execution itself will certainly do little to dispel the notion that this was "victors' justice"—the victors being, not the United States, but the Shi'a.

None of this augurs well for the future of what we should get used to calling "the former Iraq." Indeed, the Washington debate surrounding how to "fix Iraq" is irrelevant, because something that does not exist any longer—namely, Iraq as a functioning state—cannot be fixed. In the guise of US-inspired constitutional arrangements, the Shi'a majority has succeeded in arrogating near-absolute power to itself.

Thus, what only a few months ago had looked from Washington like a successful transition to some sort of representative government is obviously a travesty. Just as under Saddam, power today grows out of the barrel of the gun—only now the state does not hold a monopoly on the means of violence. Every militia, every ministry, every Shi'a political faction, has its own guns, goons, and death squads, while the Sunnis continue to use the stockpiles of weapons they accumulated under Saddam to fight a rear-guard action against the new order, apparently legitimized by elections.

There is no power—save a new violent dictatorship—that can bring Shi'a, Sunnis and Kurds to live in one body politic. America's chimerical dream of democratizing overnight a deeply divided society accustomed only to violence and coercion has unleashed a terrifying array of political demons.

In these circumstances, the post-Baker-Hamilton debate in Washington is largely irrelevant to the future of Iraq, though it continues to be crucial to the future of US power, prestige and standing in the world. The future of Iraq will be decided by the people of Iraq, but with bullets, not ballots. The United States and the entire international community are utterly unequipped to deal with this Middle Eastern version of Yugoslavia and its regional consequences. And, unlike Yugoslavia's successor states, which could look to Europe, the lack of a legitimate Arab democratic role model makes crafting a democratic order even more difficult.

Some Europeans and others may gloat over America's failure in Iraq, and the ineptness—or worse—of US post-occupation policy cries to heaven. Yet the root causes of that failure go deeper, to Iraq's creation as an artificial entity in the 1920s by British imperialist planners, who stitched together three disparate provinces of the defeated Ottoman Empire into a state that never had a coherent identity.

Indeed, the very foundation of Iraq was based on victors' justice: the British Empire, having vanquished the Ottomans, made the Sunni Arabs overlord in a country in which they were a minority. That arrangement has now come unglued following another cycle of victors' justice.

The consequences of this re-ordering of power are not yet clear. But a coherent Iraqi state—whether unitary, federal, or confederal—will not grow out of a society in which one part of the population views Saddam, rightly, as a gruesome oppressor, while another part reveres him as a hero and martyr.

Wars always have unintended consequences and cruel ironies. In Iraq, only now is it becoming evident that some states cannot be saved without being destroyed. ***Project Syndicate***

Shlomo Avineri is professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and former director general of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Stage moms

YOUNG BLOOD

Maryam Fatima B. Chawdhury

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

YOU THINK YOU HAVE A PROBLEM HAVING A STAGE mom? How about me? I have one mother, four aunts and more than a dozen family friends who are all convinced that I'll be Miss Universe one day.

All of my life, I have been surrounded by doting females, who send me clothes with rules attached ("Wear this white skirt with those pumps, this blouse with that pair of pants…"), turn their noses up at my interests, curse the posture I inherited from my father, like his cynicism, match me with their sons, nephews and idols (my mom wanted Michael Bublé as a son-in-law once), and generally dictate how I should live my life to become an ideal beauty contestant.

They've got it all figured out. To them, I'm the shooting star they've all been waiting for, the one who will fulfill their dreams.

When my aunts find out I'm in the area, they all invite me to their homes. Once, an aunt asked me to sing for her. Little did I know that she was planning to drag me off to an audition for a singing contest on TV. I got out of that knot by feigning menstrual cramps.

Another aunt took me to the mall with her. We walked around, until my poor footsies were pooped. Unfortunately for her, there weren't any talent scouts around. But for me, they might as well have been in Pluto, for all I cared.

One aunt seemed to live to dress me up. It was her lifetime obsession to turn me into a living Barbie doll. Whenever I went to her place, I'd make sure my suitcases wouldn't be able to accommodate any stray pink tube tops that some sneaky female relatives might put into it while I wasn't looking. But the moment she would open my bags, I knew my frocks and blacks were history. She'd pull me to her bedroom and pull down a whole mall of clothes and demand that I try everything. I would be stuck in a pile of tank tops and miniskirts, wondering how my "Silent Hill" game was faring without a player at the PlayStation 2 still running in the living room.

The same aunt would take me along whenever she had a party to attend, and I'd be stuck in the middle of housewives talking about starlets and models and feeling more and more like a bird in a gilded cage. Or better still, a moose in a tutu.

Since Vogue declared "Goth" fashionable, my regular shipment of clothes from my saintly aunts has included a poor excuse for a corset once or twice. I'm proud of the fact that crowds part when I pass because people are afraid I might grab a handful of their hair and manufacture little voodoo dolls.

I stopped wearing my usual smudged massive eyeliner the moment Hillary Duff started popularizing the smoky-eye effect. People used to fear me. I didn't have to explain myself to them. Now I'm just like every *kikay* you meet on the street.

There was a time even my hair became an issue. That was when rebonding became the "in" thing. My aunts started cursing their own genes for the natural curling of my once-so-straight-and-shiny hair. I didn't care. I was happy with my locks. At least if I got lost in a crowd, I'd be easy to spot. I'd be the fur ball in black amid the sea of straight, shiny, boring hair.

An aunt offered to pay for the parlor fees. I refused. I said I'd only let her cut my hair and no thanks for the proposed hair overhaul.

The *parlorista* somehow got wind of what my aunt wanted. After my haircut, she ironed my hair straight to give me a taste of things to come. I have to admit it looked good. My aunt looked at me as if to say, "This could be permanent, you know…" After a day, I got bored and wanted my curls back.

When curly hair became trendy, she stopped pestering me about my hair. I also had my hair relaxed that season.

One of my mom's gay friends kept hinting of the "possibilities" if she would let me undergo training under him. When I was 13 or 14, he would come every day to work with me on "the walk." I was supposed to glide through the room. I felt ridiculous. After a while, I psyched myself into thinking this would be just like theater, and I began to enjoy myself.

I was starting to turn from faulty hovercraft to delicate swan when I realized what perfecting the catwalk would mean for me. There would be lights everywhere, a long ramp in front of me, makeup and sweat on my poor nearly naked body, and at the edge of the stage, an obnoxious bunch of people who barely even know me but whose judgment of the personality I "exude" onstage would brand me for life. I realized that this sort of thing was different from theater. In theater, you take off the mask when you go offstage. In beauty contests, you wear the mask all your life.

That's when I devolved into homo erectus. My mom's friend gave up. "Maybe when she's older…," he said hopefully.

I may not be an adult yet, but at the rate things are going, the chances of me turning into an ideal young woman seem bleak. My mom curses college for my smart mouth (which is growing smarter and sassier every sem), and I don't even care about my grades. I spend way too much time in front of a computer or buried in a book or sketchpad to even join personality development classes or go to a shrink. I associate myself with the "wrong" type of people and I have too many secrets to keep. My joining a beauty contest would be disastrous. Instead of ending my answers with "world peace," I'd probably say something like "chaos is beauty."

I hope I do not offend any title holders. I happen to respect beauty queens. I believe it takes grit to put yourself in situations where anyone can just bash you and mock you for anything you say or do. Unfortunately, I do not have a quick wit when it comes to charming people. What I can do is crack a joke only few people understand. If you want me to write a paper on the relevance of social customs in an ant farm, I can do it. But I cannot talk while consciously trying to win people's approval. I don't even want to win anyone over.

Call me insensitive, but I do not think I'm cut out for fulfilling other people's fantasies. I may be idealistic, but I am far from ideal. And I am not a doll. I am not a symbol of truth, beauty and justice. I cannot be that because I've long lost hope of finding a society that upholds them. Philippine society feigns support for individuality, yet whenever someone attempts something new, they castigate the deviant—and then follow in his footsteps (or at least explore the path he left behind). The deviants of today are the gods of tomorrow.

Sorry, aunties. I appreciate the efforts you put into making me "beautiful", and the clothes keep me from having to go shopping (which can be very difficult due to my indecisive nature, cult ordeal). But I like myself the way I am.

If Raushan suddenly turns gay and decides to join a beauty pageant, I suggest you support him all the way. I will. People say he is prettier than I.

Maryam Fatima B. Chawdhury, 17, is a second year Mass Communication student of the University of the Philippines Visayas, Cebu College.

Heroes should inspire, not put others to shame

PHILIPPINE DAILY LETTERS INQUIRER

EVERY TIME THE FILIPINO PEOple celebrate Rizal Day (Dec. 30) we always hear that: Rizal was the most brilliant Filipino genius. Rizal was a Renaissance man. Rizal mastered 22 languages. Rizal was nationalistic. Rizal was perfect.

Since childhood, the image most of us have of Rizal is that of some sort of a Filipino Christ, someone far removed from the rest of humanity, someone who would put us all to shame. "You can never be a hero. You can never be a Rizal!" our teachers seem to tell us.

But a hero should not tower "above" his countrymen. A hero should be someone like the rest of us.

I do not have any intention to denigrate Rizal, but I want to appeal to everyone to stop making Rizal a god and make him human again. We would admire Rizal even more if we know about the struggles he had, his difficulties in school, his "sexual fantasies" and "adventures," etc. because we then would know that we, too, have the potential to achieve greatness and become heroes.

When you get to read the Zaides, it's as if Rizal could do no wrong and you start feeling so embarrassed or ashamed of yourself. This shouldn't be the case. Heroes should inspire us, not shame us.

—DAVE TABANIAG,
president,
Bahay Biyaya Student Council,
8 Saint Michael St.,
Cubao, Quezon City

Lawmaker explains Cha-cha advocacy and relief efforts in Albay

NEAL CRUZ SAW IT ALL WRONG when he continued his tirade against me in his column in the Dec. 27, 2006 issue of the INQUIRER. The hearsay, falsity and malice which afflict his comments border on recidivism. The following are the facts:

1. My presence in my district after "Reming" struck to help my constituents is irrefutable. It is not an "alibi" for my Charter change advocacy. My record in the House speaks for my consistent independent stance. I do not have "lords and masters in the House and Malacañang." I follow my conviction that constitutional reform is necessary, but I am firmly against postponing the May 2007 elections and lifting term limits. My explanation of my vote attests to this position.

2. I do not have a son running for mayor in Albay. My son, Edcel B. Lagman Jr., is a councilor in Quezon City. Consequently, the statement of Cruz that we withheld distribution of DSWD relief goods until we "could stamp the name of his (my) son who is running for mayor on the packages" is an absolute fabrication.

3. The DSWD released the goods to the local government units through the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council, not my office, and were immediately distributed to the victims.

4. No DSWD relief goods bore the name of any Lagman. What the Lagmans distributed were relief items they purchased with their own funds or solicited from private donors.

5. Bishop Ramon Tronqued of Tabaco City did not plead for the distribution of relief goods but was the one who blocked their distribution by the relief workers of former Rep. Krisel Lagman-Luistro to the evacuees in the Pastoral Center. His action was partisan and prejudiced. His hysterics in driving away my daughter's relief workers were prompted by the importuning of Vice Mayor Oscar Rocha, who arrived while the items were about to be distributed and reported the matter to Tronqued. Rocha is a lay minister whom Tronqued is reportedly supporting for mayor and in whose ticket Tronqued's brother is running for councilor.

To confirm Tronqued's bias, a priest distributed relief items to the Pastoral Center evacuees in the name of Rocha earlier that day. The evacuees eventually went to my district office to get their share even as they cursed the unchristian conduct of the bishop.

Tronqued is also prejudiced against me and my daughter for authoring bills on family planning which are vehemently opposed by the Catholic Church.

6. The relief items initially distributed by my daughter were the excess of the goods for the Mayon evacuees which she purchased personally. Unlike DSWD relief goods, they consisted of commercial (not NFA) rice, milk and assorted foodstuffs, all contained in pails. When she started the distribution on Dec. 4, no relief goods had been received by my office from the DSWD. We made sure the LGUs distributed first so that the people would appreciate the government's immediate relief efforts.

—REP. EDCEL C. LAGMAN,
first district of Albay

Do dishonest gov't officials believe in karma?

I WAS DEEPLY TOUCHED, UPON reading "Condo guard returns P500,000," by the way security guard George Bacod demonstrated his honesty at this time when extreme hunger grips 19 percent or 3.3 million Filipinos throughout the country. Honesty must run in the blood of the Filipino people.

In gratitude, the owner of the money gave him P2,000, an amount that was enough for Bacod to buy Christmas gifts for his two children. Bacod was featured in "Magandang Umaga Pilipinas" on ABS-CBN television and given a small envelope contain some money. His two sons also received several Christmas gifts.

Dishonest people do not believe in karma, but Bacod believed that if he kept the money, nobody knows what that would have cost his family in the future.

Do we also have honest officials and employees in government? Do they also believe in karma?

—TRINIDAD ESTURAS PETEZA,
Barangay Camambugan,
Daet, Camarines Norte 4600

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NO TO TYRANTS
PAALAM...
PRES. GMA
TULONGAN NINYO
ARAY ABRA!!!
ANIA TI BASOL KO?

BERSAMIN'S supporters carry streamer saying, "What has Abra done to deserve this?" PDI PHOTO.

Violence could beget violence in Abra

FIVE YEARS AGO, I WROTE AN article which was published in the INQUIRER on Dec. 12, 2001. It was titled "Back to the ways of violence." I mentioned how I grew up in Ilocos Sur, which had the worst cases of violence during the 1960s and 1970s, most of which were politically motivated.

I thought that the lull that came later would last for decades—until the murder of the provincial auditor and his driver in broad daylight on the national road in Bantay, Ilocos Sur, near the Philippine National Police headquarters. I concluded by stating: "This is a way of life in my home province. A tooth for a tooth. A life for a life."

The twin murders have not yet been solved until now. The same thing could happen with regard to the death of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr.

This is not hard to believe. The ways of justice can make it difficult to predict outcomes. And since the victim is from Abra, it is possible that if justice is not done soon, more lives will be lost. While Abra belongs to the Cordillera Autonomous Region, not the Ilocos, the people there are Ilocanos by culture and behavior. This could be the reason so many killings have happened in the past two years.

This situation will continue unless the government acts forcefully now and we could end up scaring away investors, both local and foreign. The Philippines badly needs these investors if it wants to continue the economic gains that have been made so far and for which I salute our government officials.

—JERRY A. QUIBILAN,
Col. Salvador Reyes St.,
Poblacion Norte,
Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur 2705

'Noli' dedicated to Filipino people, 'Fili' to Gomburza

THIS IS TO CORRECT AN ERROR in the column of Isagani A. Cruz in the Dec. 30 issue of the INQUIRER, where he said: "It was the execution of Gomburza to whom Rizal dedicated the 'Noli Me Tangere' that ignited the spark of resistance against the Spanish government."

It was Rizal's second novel, "El Filibusterismo," that was dedicated to the memory of the three priests, popularly known as Gomburza, who were executed at Bagumbayan in 1872. "Noli Me Tangere" was dedicated to the Filipino people, with the intention of opening their minds to the real situation then prevailing in the country.

The influence of these two novels on our countrymen may have been the same, but I am writing this letter to set the historical record straight.

This must have been an innocent oversight on the part of Cruz, whose straightforward views on current issues I have always admired.

—TRINIDAD O. REGALA,
professor, Spanish and Philippine Literature in Spanish,
University of the Philippines,
Diliman, Quezon City

Arroyo administration bowed to US pressure

AS A LAWYER, I WOULD LIKE TO register my vehement protest, through this letter, to the midnight transfer of custody of US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith by the Arroyo administration to US authorities while this very issue had yet to be resolved by our courts.

This administration is not only willing to bow to American pressure but is most willing to disregard the processes of a co-equal branch of government. What a shame!

I hope the INQUIRER will be able to make this protest made known to the powers-that-be.

—ALVIN C. FLORES,
SDG1 Gardenville Condominium,
Sampaguita Lane,
Sta. Mesa, Manila

ConCom intended separate vote on constitutional amendments

THANK YOU FOR THE NEWS report on my interview over radio station dyLA in Cebu City. Unfortunately, the story last Dec. 14 might have created the wrong impression that I attributed an "unclear provision" in the amendment clause of the 1987 Constitution to former Chief Justice Hilario G. Davide Jr., who chaired the legislative department of the Constitutional Commission of 1986. I did not attribute that to him. The amendment provision adopted on July 9, 1986 was very clear, but it was intended for a unicameral legislature.

What I said in that interview was that "the delegates subsequently forgot to redo the pertinent provision" intended for a unicameral legislature when a bicameral Congress was approved. I did not notice any ambiguity when I sequenced the constitutional provisions on instructions of ConCom president Cecilia Muñoz-Palma.

But I agree with the position of retired Justice Vicente V. Mendoza, a constitutionalist, that if we had redone the provision, it would have been patterned after Article XV of the 1935 Constitution, which reads:

"Sec. 1. The Congress, **in joint session assembled**, by a vote of three-fourths of all the Members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, **voting separately**, may propose amendments to this Constitution." (Emphasis supplied.)

Mendoza also said:

"It is unlikely that the Constitution's framers would have provided differently had they not **overlooked** the amendment clause. Indeed, when this clause was still being discussed, the following meaningful exchange took place between Commissioner Suarez, the chair of the Committee on Amendments and Transitory Provisions, and Commissioner Regalado:

"MR. REGALADO. I also notice that both Sections 1 and 2 are premised on the anticipation that the Commission, not only the Committee, will opt for a unicameral body. In the event that a bicameral legislative body will carry the day, has the Committee prepared contingency proposals or resolutions?

"MR. SUAREZ. Yes, in that situation, we would provide to include the words 'in joint session assembled.'

"MR. REGALADO. But still maintaining the same number of votes?

"MR. SUAREZ. The commissioner is right.

"MR. REGALADO. Thank you.

"The understanding then was that, in the event a bicameral legislative body was adopted, the draft amendment clause would be adjusted by providing that when exercising its constituent power, Congress should do so 'in joint session assembled.' The event took place, but the draft amendment clause was not changed accordingly. It seems that for once Homer nodded!"

I want to clarify that then Commissioner Davide did not formulate an "unclear provision," the intent of which is anyway exceedingly clear to the framers. I added the explanation of Mendoza to clear up what really happened and put the issue to rest.

I hope that the calling of a "constitutional convention" will be voted upon in the same way by Congress.

—REGALADO E. MAAMBONG,
commissioner,
Constitutional Commission of 1986

US tempting fate this time

COMMENTARY

Eloisa Felicio Callender

IT TOOK ONLY ONE HORNY US MARINE TO bring to the fore the thorny military relations between the Philippines and the United States.

On Nov. 1, 2005, All Saints' Day in the Philippines, a not-so-saintly US Marine raped a Filipina acquaintance after a night of drinking. Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith of St. Louis, Missouri claims it was consensual sex but the facts tell otherwise. "Nicole," the alias given to the victim to protect her identity, was raped in the back of a van by Smith who admits to having sex with her. Inside the van were three other US Marines who purportedly cheered "Go, go, Smith!" during the rape. Minutes later, "Nicole" was dumped on a roadside in front of shocked bystanders, her pants around her knees and a condom stuck to her panties. Consensual sex?

The year-long saga that dominated headlines in the Philippines ended on Dec. 4, 2006 when Smith was found guilty of rape and sentenced to 40 years in prison. Smith was temporarily detained in a small office in a local city jail until both governments could agree, as required by the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), in which detention facility he will serve his sentence.

Events took an interesting turn on Dec. 29 when both Philippine and American governments violated the order of the judge and, in the middle of the night, sneaked Smith out of jail and reverted custody to the US Embassy in Manila. The explanation? It's what the two countries agreed on. Never mind that the judge's order was for Smith to serve his sentence in a facility run by Philippine authorities and under its control and jurisdiction, as required by the VFA. Since the US Embassy was so intent on violating the order, why didn't they send the rapist to Club Med? It's not under Philippine jurisdiction either.

It's important to note that Smith was accorded a fair and prompt trial with legal assistance from the best private lawyers in the country. This is not a quarrel over Smith's guilt or conviction. This fight is about who should have custody of him while on appeal. The United States maintains that the VFA gives custody to the United States until all judicial proceedings, including appeals, are complete. The Philippine judge ruled that the judicial proceedings were over with Smith's conviction. He is free to appeal while in jail. Under Philippine law, capital offenses, including rape, are non-bailable when evidence of guilt is strong.

The disagreements are expected to crawl through the courts but the transfer—some say escape—of Smith to the US Embassy has effectively put him beyond the control and supervision of Philippine authorities. As any American kid can tell you, "possession is nine-tenths of the law." But the fait accompli may prove to be a Pyrrhic victory, or as President Bush once said, "catastrophic success," now that it has angered legal scholars who plan to fight the case all the way to the Philippine Supreme Court.

The United States had better tread carefully because the renewed scrutiny of the VFA is expected to resurrect questions about its constitutionality that the United States may wish it has not caused to be revisited.

American military presence in the Philippines violates that country's constitution and the United States is playing dumb about it. The US constitution is very clear on what makes a treaty: no Senate concurrence, no treaty. Yet the VFA was never ratified by the US Senate. Why is this important? Because our friends on the other side of the Pacific have a constitution that says foreign forces are only allowed on their soil under a treaty recognized as a treaty by the other contracting state.

The requirement, written after the People Power Revolution ousted President Marcos, was to prevent future presidents from unilaterally entering into executive agreements of such import and to assure such treaties are accorded equal importance and treatment by the other country. The United States, in effect, is invoking treaty rights under a mere executive agreement. And because the VFA was not recognized as a treaty by the United States as required by the Philippine constitution, the VFA is unconstitutional under Philippine law.

These were the same arguments made by petitioners to the Philippine Supreme Court in 2000 asking it to nullify the VFA as unconstitutional. In dismissing the petitions, the Supreme Court said the petitioners had no legal standing as aggrieved parties and that even if the United States treats the VFA only as an executive agreement, it still is binding as a treaty. The Supreme Court erred on an important point. The question was whether the VFA as an executive agreement was constitutional, not whether it was binding. The current Chief Justice cast a dissenting vote in the petition's dismissal.

The same issue will likely be raised again but the playing field is different this time. The justices will be reviewing the issue not as a hypothetical but as an actual case with demonstrable harm to the victim, the country's sovereignty and constitutional integrity. As a rule, treaties do not trump a sovereign nation's constitution. When treaty obligations violate a country's sovereignty or conflict with its constitution, the constitution prevails.

The United States should have quit while it was ahead. It already scored big with the acquittal of the three other cheer-leading Marines—an acquittal that even Americans admit would have been impossible in the United States. Instead, it fights for what seems a lot of risk for little gain, prompting the rape victim to comment that what's great about America is that they know how to protect their criminals. She wouldn't have been out of line if she added that some Philippine officials seem eager to protect American criminals, too.

But is the United States keeping its head down? No. In fact, it cancelled war games with the Philippines to signal its displeasure over the custody row. Many Filipinos see this as arm-twisting, given the dependency of the Philippine military on US assistance. Within days of Smith's transfer to the US Embassy, the military exercises were back on schedule. The kind of bully democracy the United States is practicing in that country will not earn it points. In 1991, the Philippine Senate kicked the US military bases out of the country. The United States is tempting fate this time by flouting the Philippine judiciary.

Eloisa Felicio Callender is a US-based Filipino writer.

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Across the NATION

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Hopes for Negros peace talks high

By Carla P. Gomez
Inquirer Visayas

BACOLOD CITY—CHURCH, MILITARY AND POLICE officials yesterday welcomed moves by Negros Occidental Gov. Joseph Marañon and priest-turned-rebel Frank Fernandez to hold talks aimed at bringing development to the province.

Msgr. Victorino Rivas, vicar general of the Diocese of Bacolod, said "this is a welcome event for Negros Occidental because the armed conflict between the rebel and government forces has caused massive destabilization of the livelihood of the people."

"The suffering of the people has been worsened by the armed conflict, that is why we welcome this turn of events. We appreciate the initiative of Governor Marañon, because as we know him, he wants peace in the province so services can be delivered to poor in the countryside," Rivas said.

He expressed hope that the talks would lead to lasting peace.

Top military and police officials of Negros Occidental also expressed their all-out support to the proposed peace talks.

Col. Gregorio Fajardo, 303rd Infantry Brigade commander, described the exploratory talks between Marañon and Fernandez as a "welcome development" in the pursuit of peace in Negros.

"If the problem of insurgency can be addressed by local government units in their areas, so much the better for us," Fajardo said.

Senior Supt. Rosendo Franco, provincial police director, said he has been encouraging LGUs to initiate dialogs with communist rebels, since he assumed the Negros Occidental police command last year.

Franco said he hoped that Fernandez is sincere in searching for a solution to nearly 40 years of insurgency in Negros.

Rivas also lauded Fernandez, head of the NDF-Communist Party of the Philippines-Negros, for his willingness to dialog with Marañon to explore avenues of "cooperation in the interest of the masses."

"It's a welcome event for the Church, it requires goodwill on the part of the government and also the rebel groups," he said.

According to Rivas, this initiative could become a "stepping stone for larger peace talks nationwide."

Asked if the Church would be willing to have a panelist in the talks, Rivas said that Bishop Vicente Navarra would be amenable to participate in this dialog.

The peace talks would give the Church an opportunity to participate in attaining peace for the people, especially the poor, he added.

Marañon yesterday said he was open to the idea of having a representative of the Church in a panel he is creating for exploratory talks with the rebels.

The governor had announced that he is creating a five-member panel to represent the province of Negros Occidental in conducting exploratory talks with local NDF leaders.

He also said he expects Fernandez to create his own panel to immediately start local peace talks, discuss specific topics and set ground rules, as a first step.

The governor said he would announce the members of the provincial government's panel simultaneously with Fernandez's announcement of his once both sides reach an agreement.

Ben Solilapsi, of Alab Katipunan, said his group supports the efforts of the governor to hold exploratory talks with the local CPP-NPA, but they believe that it will never prosper.

"The CPP-NPA will never entertain it," he said, claiming that the proposal of Fernandez is pure propaganda.

Marañon said that he would like to tone down his proposal for peace talks so that it would not be construed as a publicity stunt.

"I want to see development in the countryside. If peace talks are a way of achieving that we will explore the idea," he said.

Work gives hope to villagers displaced by calamities

LEGAZPI CITY—SOME VILLAGERS displaced by Supertyphoon "Reming" in Albay found temporary work building latrines in 19 evacuation shelters in Albay.

At least 84 men and women were able to build 124 hand-washing facilities, 248 toilets, and 49 single-unit bathing cubicles in a 'cash-for-work' program implemented by Oxfam, an international humanitarian organization, during the holiday season.

The workers were selected from among the evacuees in the shelters, where the sanitary toilets were built, and were paid P150 to P200 each everyday, depending on their skills and kind of work, said Mel Capistrano, program manager of Oxfam's Emergency Response in Bicol.

Joselito Millare, 32, father of two and whose family was temporarily housed at the upper Malabog evacuation center in Daraga, Albay was one of those hired by Oxfam for the construction of double-pit latrines in the evacuation site.

"We were given employment and we ourselves were able to benefit from the work we did," said Millare.

He added he was able to buy noodles and a half-kilogram of meat last Christmas while saving P500 for his family's house transfer.

A GIRL is driven to begging for alms from passengers of passing buses in Barangay Padang in Legazpi City, one of the areas hardest hit by mudflows and floods whipped by Supertyphoon "Reming."

NIÑO JESUS ORBETA/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

Oxfam earlier distributed P1,000 cash grants and non-food items in Barangay Bungalon in Daraga town and Barangays Gapo, Tagaytay, Baligang, Cabangan, and Salugan in Camalig—all in Albay—covering 2,100 families.

In Malilipot, Sto. Domingo, and Bacacay—all in Albay—more than 3,000 families benefited from the cash-for-work program of World Vision, an international Christian relief organization, which was assisted by a $200,000-funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The hired workers, who rebuilt destroyed houses and cleared clogged roads, each received P100 and 5 kg of rice everyday.

Evacuees staying in public schools would have to decamp on Sunday as classes were to resume on Jan. 8 as ordered by the Department of Education here. Tent cities would be built in relocation areas in Albay to temporarily provide shelter for the displaced villagers, said Evelyn Jerusalem, public information officer of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Bicol.

Nongovernment organizations and local government agencies are now involved in the construction of houses for the displaced villagers and providing alternative livelihood for those who have lost their farms to the mudflow, Jerusalem said.

She said the local government units are now submitting their rehabilitation plans, which would be consolidated and submitted to the DSWD central office next week.

A total of 6,980 families, or 33,789 persons, from 128 villages housed in 126 shelters in Albay still rely on government and nongovernment relief assistance for more than a month now after Reming ravaged Bicol, said the provincial disaster coordinating council. *Ephraim Aguilar, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

Farmers turn to fishing in wake of farms' destruction

LUCENA CITY—WITH THEIR farms devastated by successive typhoons, displaced farmers are now turning to the sea for livelihood.

Glenn Forbes, coastal and marine program officer of environmentalist group Tanggol Kalikasan, said the trend among farmers in the coastal towns of Quezon and Marinduque provinces is to once more paddle their way back to Tayabas Bay.

"Most of the farmers in the coastal towns of Bondoc Peninsula in Quezon province and Marinduque are also fishermen. Temporarily shifting back to full-time fishing to earn a living would not be difficult for them. They still remember the basics (of fishing)," Forbes told the INQUIRER.

He urged the government to extend support to the displaced farmers-turned-fishermen by providing them with basic fishing equipment.

"The concerned government agencies can form a cooperative and provide it with fishing boats and fishing paraphernalia for the use of the typhoon victims," Forbes said.

Typhoon "Reming" has battered the island province of Marinduque with more than 40,000 families displaced while widespread crop destruction and damage to fishing boats has disrupted the livelihood of most islanders.

Dependence

The coastal towns of Mulanay, San Narciso, San Andres and San Francisco took the brunt of three successive typhoons that destroyed most farms in the area.

"But with the help of concerned government agencies and private sector, the typhoon victims are now slowly recovering from the tragedy. Most of them only need basic fishing equipment to survive. They can't forever depend on others," Forbes said.

The environmentalist group asked government authorities to conduct sustained anti-illegal fishing operations in Tayabas Bay, particularly against big-time commercial fishing vessels.

He said despite the efforts of volunteer fish wardens, environmentalist groups, policemen and local government officials to stop illegal commercial fishing in Tayabas Bay, the multi-sectoral groups could not catch up with the fast and modern big-time fishing vessels.

Ignored law

"Our motorized outrigger boat is no match to the speed of commercial fishing vessels," Forbes said.

Republic Act No. 8550, or the Fisheries Code of 1998, prohibits commercial fishing vessels from operating within 15 kilometers of municipal waters.

But this has been often ignored by commercial fishers who continue to operate with impunity in prohibited fishing areas to the disadvantage of fishermen.

Janet Geneblazo, Tanggol Kalikasan information officer, said despite their sustained anti-illegal fishing operations in Tayabas Bay and along the highway route being used by traders of illegally caught fish, the unlawful operation is still going strong and unabated. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon*

Top Army exec says NPAs using kids as shields

LUCENA CITY—A TOP OFFICIAL of the Armed Forces Southern Luzon Command (Solcom) based here in Camp Nakar accused the New People's Army of using children as shields in a recent encounter with government soldiers in the island town of Polillo in Quezon province.

Quoting a report, Lt. Gen. Alexander Yano, Solcom commander, said government troopers from the Army's 16th Infantry Battalion encountered seven armed NPA rebels in the village of Languyan on Dec. 30.

Yano said that during the gunfight, the soldiers noticed the presence of children in the rebels' position.

He said the soldiers immediately stopped firing for fear the children might get hit in the crossfire and give the communist guerrillas an opportunity to escape.

"The CPP/NPA once again showed their wanton disregard for the children's rights by using them as shields. They have put the lives of the children in harm's way just so they could escape capture," Yano said.

Government forces recovered one cal. 45 pistol from the rebel's position. No casualty was reported on both sides.

In another report, at least two suspected NPA rebels were arrested and surrendered to the military in separate occasions, the Solcom spokesperson said quoting reports.

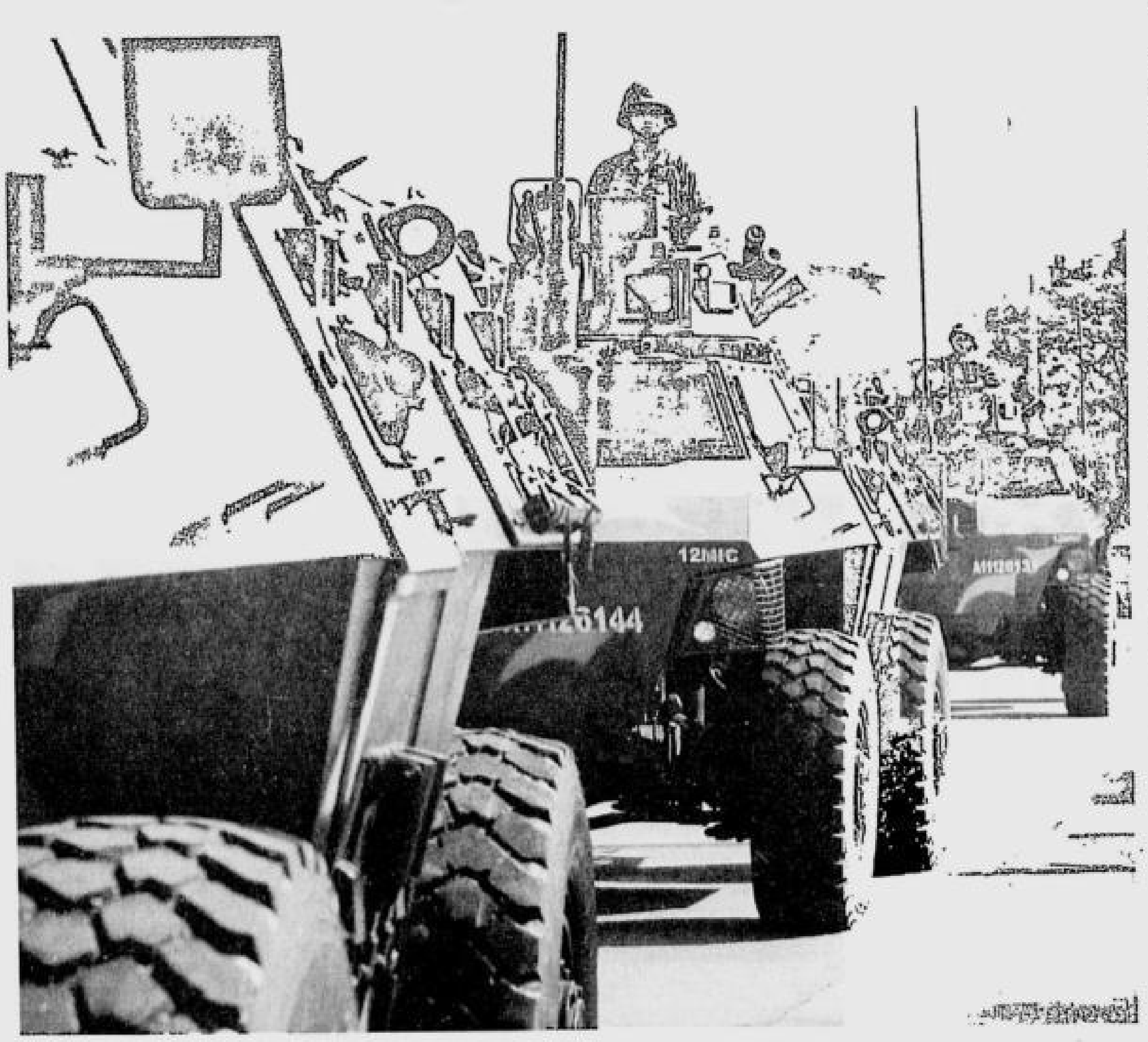
Lt. Col. Roderick Parayno identified the rebel returnee as one Michael Milaya alias "Ka Jemar," reportedly a squad leader of the "Komite sa Platun" with code name "Saguisag" under the Komite sa Larangang Gerilya (KLG) 54 of the Communist Party of the Philippines operating in the island province of Marinduque.

Parayno said Milaya surrendered to the officials of the Charlie Company of the Army's 74th Infantry Battalion last Dec. 28.

Milaya has a warrant of arrest for the crime of rebellion and has a cash reward of P80,000 for his arrest, according to Parayno.

"He decided to surrender because of the unfair treatment of their higher commanders to their comrades. He also revealed that their members are dwindling with many members opting to be inactive," Parayno quoted Milaya.

On Tuesday, government troops arrested a certain Leah Moreno 'y Lucena alias "Ka Juvel" in an operation in the village of Binahaan in Pagbilao town. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon*



ARMORED personnel carriers make their way to a battlefront. Army officers have accused communist guerrillas of using human shields to cover their escape routes.

RAFFY LERMA

Rape-slay cases grip Davao Sur towns in fear

BANSALAN, DAVAO DEL SUR—Fear of alleged cult members sexually attacking and murdering women has gripped many areas in the province as police authorities were still trying to piece together evidence that could pin down suspects in the murder-slaying of at least three women here.

Another victim survived an attack late last month.

The fear of sexual attacks from the alleged cult was further fanned by a latest police report that a 42-year-old woman from Matanao, Davao del Sur narrowly escaped death on Jan. 4 after having been attacked by a hooded suspect.

Senior Insp. Restituto Abril, Matanao police chief, said Maria (not the real name) had just entered the toilet at the back of her house in Sitio Casiawa in Barangay Poblacion around 7 p.m. when she saw a hooded suspect inside.

Abril said based on Maria's account, the suspect slashed her pants and shirts with a knife.

"She was shocked but had immediately recovered. She shouted for help, prompting the suspect to flee," he said.

Based on Maria's description, Abril said the suspect was about 20 years old and at least 5'4" in height.

Stories about motorcycle-riding men knocking on doors of houses during the wee hours of the morning have also been spreading like wildfire in the province while village officials reported seeing some suspects disappearing into the night.

Eduardo Giral, New Visayas village chief, said they chased two unidentified persons in the evening of Dec. 24 and Jan. 1 but failed to catch up with them.

He said the men suddenly vanished as volunteers were closing in.

Rosita Orbita, a resident of Poblacion Uno here, claimed she had a near encounter with the supposed cult-members.

Orbita said late last month, she heard knocks on her door but did not open up.

She said when she peeped at a hole, she saw two bonnet-wearing persons.

Orbita said she screamed for help and the men went away.

Senior Supt. Anselmo Pinili, provincial police director, said they have found no evidence that a cult was indeed behind the attacks on women here.

He urged residents not to pass on false information that could only worsen the fear gripping many areas here and in nearby towns.

"Lawless elements can take advantage of their fear to embark on other types of criminality. They must keep in touch with the police for swift response and actions," Pinili said.

But in Digos City, police authorities said they were investigating a suspect in connection with the rape-slaying cases.

Senior Insp. Edito Mandi, Digos City police operations chief, said Wilson Labandero, 46, married and a resident of Barangay Igpit, Digos City was arrested on Jan. 3 during a routine police inspection of beerhouses in the city.

He said Labandero yielded an unlicensed revolver when accosted.

PO1 Roel Señerez, Digos City police investigator, said Labandero has admitted he belongs to the Sagrada Corazon, an anti-communist vigilante group.

But Señerez said the suspect denied any involvement in the rape-slaying cases. *Eldie S. Aguirre, Inquirer Mindanao*

Camarines Sur dragon boat race team wins another championship

PILI, CAMARINES SUR—THE championship streak of the Cam-Sur Dragon Boat Team (CDBT) continued when it grabbed the championship in the 2006 Dragon Boat Race Annual Championship 3rd Leg Round held in December last year at the Baywalk, Roxas Boulevard in Manila.

The CDBT, a pet project of Gov. Luis Raymund F. Villafuerte that showcases local rowers' talents in local and international competitions, achieved its top performance for the fourth time, beating seasoned teams in dragon boat races in the country and in Singapore.

Relatively a rookie in the dragon boat race, the unprecedented championship streak of the CDBT has been a record breaker in the Philippines since, in a year, it had already defeated teams that were the toast of dragon boat race aficionados.

The CDBT's power did not escape the attention of foreign competitors in the Sava Sprints Rowing Competition held in September last year in Singapore when it captured the admiration of rowers from Canada, United States, Great Britain, Malaysia, Indonesia and the city-state.

In its recent record, the CDBT clocked 2:06:64 in the final heat against the Philippine National Police Rowing Team, the runner-up in the recent race, which clocked 2:07:46.

Another team from Bicol won the third place with a time record of 2:10:46.

The PNP dragon boat team has been the closest rival of the CDBT.

The homegrown rowers of Camarines Sur defeated four times the PNP dragon boat team and won the championship in races, including the Singapore race where the former was the overall champion in all categories in the men's division—200 m and 500 m sprints and 1,000-m race.

"With the skills and talents of the CDBT, I am confident that our dragon boat team, when given proper training, would excel and achieve more victories and high-level competitiveness in international competition," Villafuerte said.

The governor added that the CDBT would be sent to compete in dragon boat races this year in Manila Bay and Boracay and in China.

When the CDBT first competed in the Atienza Cup at Manila Bay in March last year, it placed third even as the local rowers were without practice and training.

In its second and third participation in the dragon boat races in May last year in Manila and Boracay, the championship was already in the hands of the local rowers.

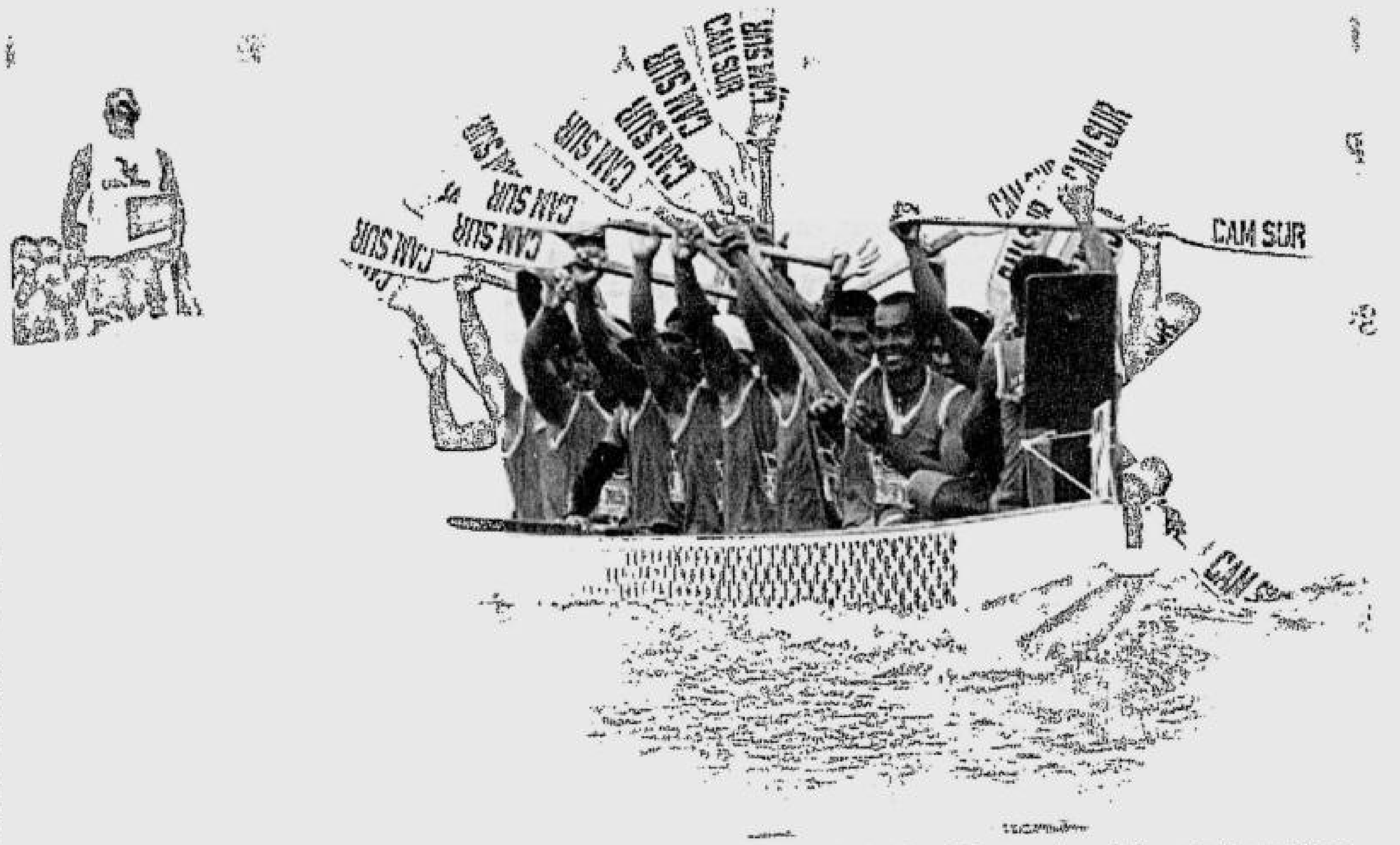
But the local rowers' championship streak was eclipsed by its performance in June during the Philippine Olympic Festival when it placed second.

The CDBT regained its top performance in October last year when it reclaimed the championship in the Dragon Boat Race Annual Competition at Baywalk, Manila which was repeated in Singapore, and the most recent race held in December last year in Manila.

The local rowers were veterans of annual boat races held in Naga City during the religious regional fiesta of Bicol, the Feast of Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia.

The CDBT members, who had learned to row since their childhood, came from the towns of Canaman, Magarao and Milaor and led by its team coach Ruben Brazal and assistant coach Bernardo San Andres Jr.

Leading the team in its championship streak are steerman Geby Bergonio and signal man Jessie Asay. *Juan Escandor Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon*



THE PRIDE of Camarines Sur, its dragon boat race team, spends time practicing its winning form. The team brought honor to the province and to its leading supporter, Governor Villafuerte.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Pampanga gov turns to 26 village chiefs

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Pampanga Gov. Mark Lapid claimed he got to his side 26 of 29 village chiefs who earlier had pledged support for his rival, Board Member Lilia Pineda.

In a statement, the first that the 27-year-old governor had issued on his reelection bid, Lapid said the village leaders "pledged unqualified support [for] and unity" with him during a caucus on Jan. 3.

The statement was accompanied by a photograph showing Lapid and the village leaders flashing the thumbs up sign. The governor called them the "solid bloc of barangay chairmen."

Lapid said they "reiterated their commitment to support only Lakas-CMD candidates in the coming May polls after expressing dismay over the decision of Porac Mayor Exequiel Gamboa and Vice Mayor Conradlito de la Cruz to join [the opposition] and challenge Porac's favorite governor-son."

The photograph carried the caption "tune pamisanmetung (Genuine United) Porac."

The caucus took place after Gamboa and De la Cruz led eight councilors, 29 village chiefs and some 7,000 supporters who gathered at the Lubao gym on Sunday to pledge support for Pineda, 55.

In that assembly, Pineda's husband, suspected "jueteng" lord Rodolfo "Bong" Pineda, came up on stage and rallied support for her.

Bong Pineda's rare public appearance was seen as an early battle signal to the governor and his father, Sen. Manuel "Lito" Lapid.

Sources in the Lapid camp said it was the governor's mother, Marissa, who worked to win back the village leaders. The senator was absent in the caucus.

The governor has avoided media interviews. *Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon*

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo leads the ceremonial drive-through at the Baguio-Aritao Road Improvement Project in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya on Jan. 2. The road project was one of several that the government completed last year.
PCPO MALACAÑANG

Airports among projects on target, says Mendoza

THE ADMINISTRATION OF President Macapagal-Arroyo has completed various infrastructure projects nationwide last year and more are lined up for completion this year, the Department of Transportation and Communications said yesterday.

In a press statement, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza said the infrastructure projects led to more jobs and growth in trade, agriculture and tourism.

In his statement, Mendoza said the government would continue to pursue many strategic infrastructure projects this year even as it has completed and started many other projects last year vital to the country's economic and social progress.

Some of the projects, including those undertaken in partnership with the private sector, were aimed at decongesting Metro Manila and bringing progress to the provinces.

"Vastly improving our transportation networks is a cornerstone of the government thrust to further improve the economy through commerce, industry and tourism," Mendoza said in a yearend report to Ms Arroyo.

"The bottom line of all of these is the delivery of public service," he said, "providing the foundations for economic growth."

Among the projects were the development of new airports.

The New Iloilo Airport is 97 percent complete and will commence commercial operations in April, Mendoza reported. The Bacolod (Silay) Airport project is 80 percent complete and is targeted for completion by July 2007.

The Zamboanga Airport runway overlay is 90 percent complete.

The expansion of the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport Passenger Terminal Building in Clark is ongoing and will be completed in September.

Among the secondary airports, the upgrading and rehabilitation of Plaridel and Tagbilaran Airports are completed. Being undertaken is the upgrading and rehabilitation of Ozamiz, Virac, Dipolog and Tuguegarao Airports which will be completed this year.

Motorcycle assassins gun down Ecija trader

CABANATUAN CITY—A 67-YEAR-old businessman was shot and killed by two motorcycle-riding men in Barangay Aduas Norte here on Thursday.

Police said Romulo Valisno, owner of a textile and garments store and a restaurant in the city, was driving his car when the men drove by and shot him.

Valisno was a former political leader of Nueva Ecija Rep. Pacifico Fajardo.

Police said they were not discounting politics as a motive in the killing although Valisno's last known involvement in political activities was in 2004.

Valisno's murder came two weeks after Councilor Augusto Santiago, president of the Association of Barangay Captains in the city, was gunned down.

In Bulacan, a former councilor and his wife were shot and wounded on Friday when a group of men attacked them in Barangay Pulong Buhangin in Sta. Maria town.

Police said Rodolfo de Silva, 52, suffered from bullet wounds in the neck while his wife, Betty Jane, suffered from bullet wounds in the hand. One of the suspects hit the couple's son, Bryan, 29, with a pistol.

They were taken to a hospital in Quezon City.

Police said the De Silvas, who were in their car, were entering the family compound at 12:25 a.m. when the suspects, who were wearing camouflage shirts and pants and their faces covered by ski masks, attacked them. The suspects were armed with an M-16 Armalite rifle and .45 cal. and 9mm guns, police said.

Dante de Silva, a cousin of De Silva, said politics could be a motive in the attack as his cousin planned to run for a congressional seat in the province in May.

De Silva's relatives said the former councilor has no enemies. The family runs a bakeshop and involved in a trucking business.

In Nueva Ecija, a bus driver was wounded on Thursday when a man aboard a motorcycle chased his bus and shot him along the Maharlika Highway in the Science City of Muñoz.

Police said the suspect twice shot Anselmo Rafal, 41, a driver of a Cagayan Valley-bound bus, in full view of students in front of the north gate of the Central Luzon State University (CLSU).

No one among the bus' 20 passengers was hurt as Rafal, although wounded, was able to stop the vehicle.

Rafal suffered bullet wounds in the shoulder and arm and was taken to a hospital in nearby San Jose City.

Police said the suspect could have been angered when the bus almost hit him when it overtook his motorcycle. *Anselmo Roque and Carmela Reyes, Inquirer Central Luzon*

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INQUIRER Visayas

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House of swifts and sweets in Leyte

By Vicente S. Labro
Carigara, Leyte

Her *pastillas de leche* and other goodies are known far and wide as the best in Leyte

SWEETS AND SWIFTS" COULD HAVE BEEN an appropriate business name, but Filomena Granados Enero chose instead her nickname and her delicious food products, which were already popular.

Thus, Lumen's Pastillas and Delicacies was registered with the Department of Trade and Industry in 2001 when Enero was about to join a regional trade and food fair for the first time.

Lumen's *pastillas de leche* is still popular in her hometown in Carigara and many other places in Leyte. The *pastillas* melts in the mouth, so people say, and usually served, along with her other delicacies as dessert during fiestas, weddings, birthdays and other special occasions.

But some people have been going then to Lumen's place not only to buy her products but also to take a glimpse of birds nesting in the living room of the ancestral house where she and her family live.

The attraction is actually a colony of swifts that have built nests in the ceiling. "There are now about one hundred pairs of *balinsasayaw* (swifts) in that room," Lumen, 56, said in a recent interview in her house.

LUMEN Enero (right) does the packaging herself of her famous pastillas. ARNOLD ALMACEN

'Balinsasayaw'

Neighbors and visitors would often see a flock fluttering through the windows of the old dilapidated house. The small, feathered creatures, about five inches long with elongated compact bodies and short neck, are good fliers.

One could see the dark-colored birds leaving or landing on their small nests, some feeding a clutch and others busy making or repairing their nests, using their saliva as adhesive.

Usually, swifts build nests in caves, hollow trees or churches. Those at Lumen's are now used to seeing people at close range or even prowling cats.

The nests are close to one another. Right below them are newspapers spread on the floor to catch droppings.

According to Lumen, the house did not shelter any bird in the early 1980s when her children were still young and she wasn't even into making sweets, cakes and pastries.

But for unknown reasons, a couple of birds started making nests on the ceiling.

At first, the house help would destroy the nests to drive the birds away permanently. Lumen recalls. "*Guti-ay la anay, pagkinuha-a nagtikadamo* (There were a few birds initially, but when their nests were removed their number increased)," she says in Waray.

"One time, we went for a vacation to the Camotes Island (her husband Benjamin's hometown, an island off northern Cebu) and when we returned, we saw that the birds were already very many," Lumen says.

They decided to just leave the birds alone.

Some businessmen from Cebu, who must have heard of the story, visited the Eneros and offered to buy the bird's nests. Since then, the family has been selling the nests to them.

Bird's nest soup, whose main ingredient is the dried bird's saliva, is a popular and expensive oriental cuisine.

Every six months, Lumen says about one and a half kilos of bird's nests could be gathered and sold for around P5,000 per kilo. Those found in caves command higher prices, according to Benjamin.

Lucky charm

"Some say the birds are lucky charms," Lumen says, referring to her flourishing business.

But many others believe that her food enterprise would still prosper even without the birds. One big reason, they point out, is that her *pastillas de leche* and other goodies are known far and wide as the best in Leyte.

The reason her *pastillas* are so delicious, Lumen confides, is the main ingredient. According to her, she uses only pure and fresh carabao milk that is regularly supplied by local farmers.

When the volume of orders grew and the farmers could no longer meet her demand for fresh milk, Lumen went to the National Carabao Center at the Leyte State University in Baybay, Leyte, about 100 kilometers from Carigara, for additional milk supply.

She now produces 3,000 to 5,000 pieces of *pastillas* a day, aside from the other native delicacies she bakes at home.

Lumen says that she learned the art of making traditional cakes, pastries and sweets from her mother when she was still in high school.

An accountancy graduate from the Divine Word University, Lumen first worked in a farmers' cooperative in Carigara. She got married in the early 1970s and when her children were already studying, she decided to quit from work and put up her own processed food business.

She and her husband started their venture in the 1980s, about five years before she went into *pastillas* making, and with a capital of only less than P500. Lumen started making butter and cinnamon cookies, *roscas, decaña, torta*, and *brazo de mercedes*.

When some of her customers asked her to make *pastillas* and cassava cake, Lumen obliged. These, too, became bestsellers.

She recalled that she would go to banks, hospitals and houses in Tacloban City, about 50 km from Carigara, just to sell her products. Eventually, her efforts paid off.

Flourishing business

With the help of the Department of Trade and Industry, she joined trade and food fairs, such as the Bahandi Regional Trade Fair and Wow Philippines in Metro Manila. She supplies a businessman in Metro Manila with most of her products, and these are sold in several malls and big stores there.

"In the food fair that I recently joined, my showcase was already worth P150,000," she said.

She said she used part of her earnings to buy modern baking equipment. Their three children are now all professionals, with degrees in engineering, accountancy and nursing.

Meanwhile, the lovely small creatures continue to fly in and out of their nests in that ancient house along San Roque Street in Carigara.

Cards, gift tags made by special hands

By Ma. Diosa Labiste
Iloilo City

COMPETING WITH PRICEY GIFTS IN ONE of the malls here are homemade cards and gift tags that cost more than their actual prices because they are made by special hands.

Greetings cards in washed colors, one-of-a-kind gift tags and ornament holders decorated with tiny flowers of many colors, are among the items offered by Emmanuel Foundation, a center for children with special needs.

Buying the gifts is not only helping the children with autism and Down Syndrome, among others, but also sharing with them the joy of beauty. It is also a gesture of respect.

The gift items were made by Mariton, Paulo, Emily and Timmy, students in the prevocational program, who are learning life skills so that they can be productive and self-reliant. The skills are also meant to imbue them with discipline and problem-solving skills.

FROM LEFT: Timmy, Emily, Mariton, Teacher Aloha and Paolo of the prevocational program of Emmanuel Foundation for Children with Special Needs MA. DIOSA LABISTE

"It is fun to draw," said Mariton, 35.

When not drawing, Mariton and her classmates are deep into beadwork, stringing colorful plastic beads and fresh-water pearl bracelets. For the holidays, they produced greeting cards and gift bags in vibrant colors.

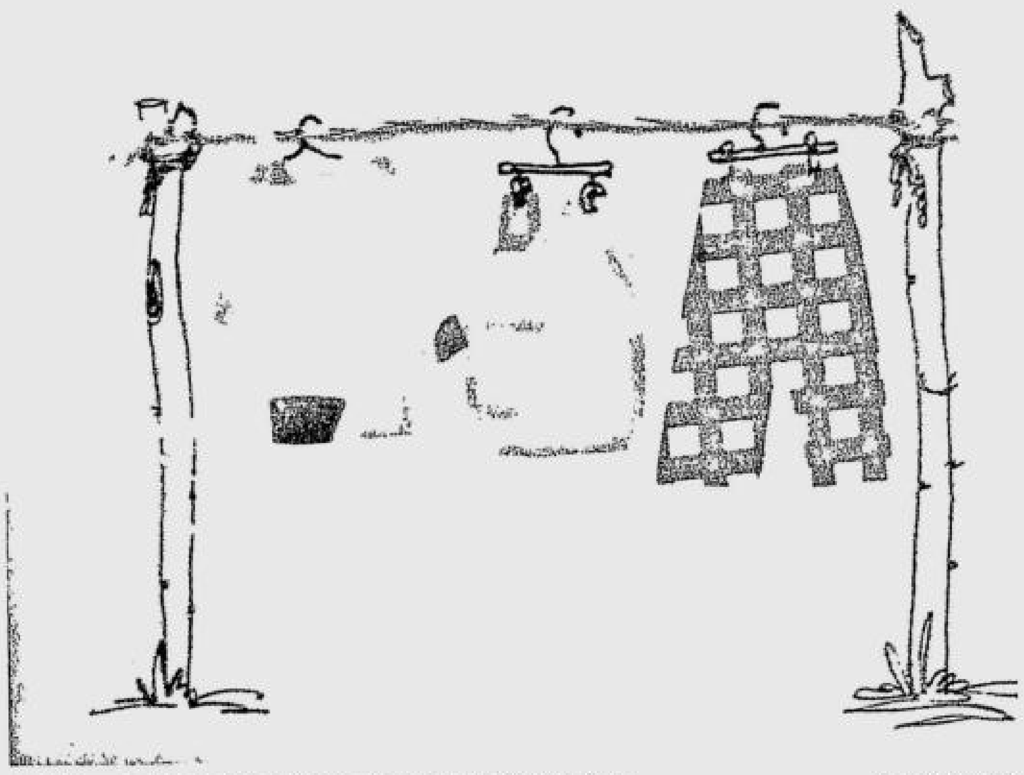
Art therapy

Arts and crafts are part of the therapy offered by Emmanuel, according to Rosalea De Leon, fondly called Teacher Uzi, the center's program director. They also learn how to cook and shop. Every Tuesday, Mariton and her friends go to the market to buy the ingredients they need for their supervised cooking class. They are not chauffeured but they take public transport. What they cook, they eat for lunch.

For Timmy, the best dish was "Pork Chop Royale." It was not fancy but filling, he said.

Their cooking skills have earned them money and praises. They had been hired to cater to private parties and a recent opening of a math-learning center. What they earn from cooking is divided among them. They spend part of their earnings when they go out on Fridays to hang out in the malls or play badminton.

De Leon said they were thinking of baking the signature cookies but the holiday rush prevented them from doing so. Maybe they will launch it on Valentine's Day.



CARD made by special children of Emmanuel Foundation. ARNOLD ALMACEN

How it started

The Emmanuel Center for Children with Special Needs was established in 1992 as an offshoot of Iloilo's Friends of the Handicap. It started as a counseling and support center for parents with special children.

The center is founded by Dr. Linda B. Que, mother of a boy with Down Syndrome. She worked hard and used her resources in setting up the center, the only privately run center in Western Visayas that looks after the needs of children with Down Syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy and developmental delays. Her work has inspired other families to join her.

In 1998, the Emmanuel Center became the Emmanuel Foundation and now headed by Josephine Caram as president. The Center offers programs on special education, early intervention for babies and toddlers, a rehabilitation program that includes physical therapy, occupational therapy and language stimulation, and the prevocational program for special children 12 years and above. Today, the center, located at M.H. del Pilar Street, Molo district, has 12 teachers.

The center conducts regular home visits, gives training to caregivers, and mentors grade-school teachers on special education. Scholarships and subsidies were also given to children from poor families.

De Leon said Emmanuel is not a school that gives out diploma to students. But the lessons taught there more than meet the pre-academic requirements for special education classes in government schools. At the center, they are taught how to be considerate and behave with other people. They are also taught the essentials of living.

The crafts and the cooking produced by Mariton and her friends have surprised many. They have been admired for their artistry and determination, and, despite being mentally challenged, they have found a way to present a positive and refreshing image of themselves during the holiday season.

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Miranda breathes life into Coca-Cola's bid

Last-second triple keeps gasping Tigers alive

GAMES TOMORROW (*Araneta Coliseum*)
4:05 p.m.—Coca-Cola vs Sta. Lucia
6:30 p.m.—Air21 vs Alaska

By Musong R. Castillo

DENNIS MIRANDA nailed a three-pointer from deep left corner to beat the game clock last night and give Coca-Cola another chance at life in the Talk 'N Text Philippine Cup.

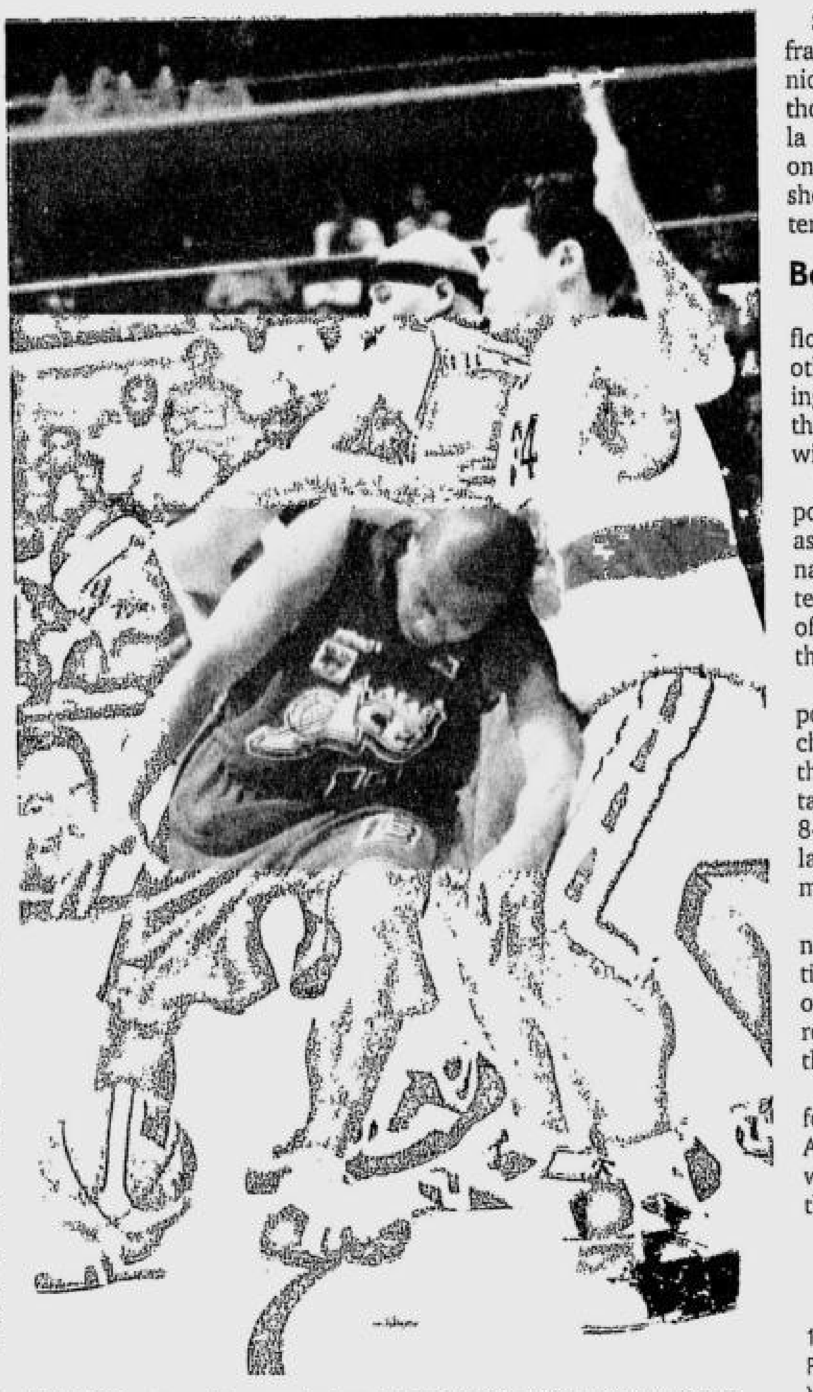
The 5-foot-10 starting guard climaxed a sizzling final minute charge by the Tigers, who clawed out of huge deficits in regulation and a six-point hole in the final minute of extension for a 99-98 decision against Alaska at the start of wildcard action at the Araneta Coliseum.

Coca-Cola actually closed out with three triples in the final minute, the first two coming from Allan Salangsang, as the Tigers won only for the sixth time in the tournament but enough to keep alive their wafer-thin hopes of advancing to the quarterfinals via the backdoor.

"When you are working hard and enjoying (what you do), sometimes you get lucky," coach Binky Favis later said.

The Tigers remained in the bottom of the standings with a 6-13 slate and would need to win two more games in this round to forge a playoff with the natural topnotcher for a shot at the final quarterfinal berth.

"That's why I told the boys that we needed to win four games, counting the playoff, if we want to (make the quarterfinals)," Favis added. "It's a tall order, yes, because we only won five games the entire elimination round."



THINGS get pretty crowded as Alaska's Willie Miller (left) tries to drive past Coca-Cola's Will Antonio (right) while Dennis Miranda and Nic Belasco jostle for position in the background. AUGUST DELA CRUZ

It looked like the Aces had the game in the bag, in two occasions actually, once in regulation and when they raced to a 96-90 lead in overtime after a Willie Miller turnaround with 1:24 to go.

Salangsang, put back in the fray only because William Antonio cramped up, hit the first of those triples in the next Coca-Cola offensive, before his second one sandwiched a Nic Belasco short stab that made it 96-98 entering the final 29 seconds.

Best player

Tony dela Cruz then missed a floating jumper for Alaska on the other end and Salangsang willingly gave up the chance to nail the game-winner by finding a wide-open Miranda.

Miranda finished with 18 points, seven rebounds and six assists, but John Arigo was named Player of the Game by the television panel on the strength of a 24-point, seven-rebound, three-assist and two-steal game.

Antonio scored 11 of his 17 points in the third period and was chiefly responsible for keeping the Tigers within striking distance of the Aces, who dropped to 8-11 and would need to win their last two games to have a mathematical chance of advancing.

But even so, Alaska would still not be assured avoiding elimination if Sta. Lucia, which carried over its 10-8 record into this round, wins just one out of its three assignments here.

Up next for the Tigers, who forged extension at 87 after two Ali Peek free throws off Belasco with eight seconds left, would be the Realtors tomorrow.

The Scores:
First Game
COCA-COLA 99—Arigo 24, Miranda 18, Antonio 17, Peek 15, Salangsang 10, Pacana 6, Misolas 5, Caceres 4, Gavino 0, Yeo 0, Ramos 0, Ferreria 0.
ALASKA 98—Miller 16, Carlaso 15, Dela Cruz 12, Julnio 12, Ferriols 10, Thoss 8, Belasco 8, Laure 7, Hugnatan 5, Singson 5.
Quarters: 20-27, 35-46, 60-64, 87-all, 99-98.

WARREN Kiamco: Three-time SEAG gold medalist.

Kiamco, Orcollo to participate in Reno 8-ball tilt

WARREN KIAMCO, the most consistent Filipino cue artist in the Southeast Asian Games, will fly to the United States next month to compete in the 2007 Reno 8-ball Open and other major tournaments.

ORCOLLO

The 36-year-old Kiamco, gold medalist in the 1991, 2001 and 2003 SEAG editions, will join defending champion Dennis Orcollo in the Reno Open set Feb. 28 to March 1 in Reno, Nevada. Also likely to play is 2005 winner Marlon Manalo.

The soft-spoken Kiamco, of Pasil, Cebu, was slated to play in the 2007 Derby City Classic which gets underway yesterday at Executive West Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky, but failed to get a booking.

"I've been trying since last December, but all the flights to Kentucky were fully booked," said Kiamco yesterday. "It's a pity as there were many divisions that I could have joined."

Kiamco missed the 2005 Manila Southeast Asian Games, where the country was adjudged the overall champion in cue events, because he was competing in the US circuit that time.

In preparation for his overseas campaign this year, Kiamco played pool maestro Efren "Bata" Reyes in a series of money game matches.

Reyes managed to join the Derby City Classic with Orcollo, Francisco "Django" Bustamante and Gandy Valle.

Kiamco beat Orcollo in the finals of the 2005 All Kansai Open in Osaka, Japan, to pocket the 1 million yen top purse. The event was dominated by Filipinos with Ramil Gallego and Antonio Lining taking the last four seats.

Reigning world champion Ronato Alcano, Orcollo and fellow Filipino Carlo Biado are scheduled to play in the All Kansai Open on Jan. 20-21.

Defending champion Masaaki Tanaka and Asian Games 8-ball winner Satoshi Kawabata will banner the host country's campaign.

Meanwhile, Roberto Gomez and Jharome Peña will try their luck in the 8-ball Battle of Scandinavian on Jan 17 in Oslo, Norway. *Marlon Bernardino*

WVL lures 47 squads, gets going tomorrow

FORTY-SIX TEAMS WILL VIE FOR HONORS IN the 2006 Women's Volleyball League (WVL) starting at 7:30 a.m. tomorrow at the Xavier School Sports Complex in Greenhills, San Juan.

Competition will be held in competitive and developmental levels of elementary and high school, according to tournament commissioner Florentino Santos and his assistant, Monica Jorge.

The tourney organized by BEST Center and sponsored by Milo has lured 15 elementary school teams and 31 high school squads.

Participating in the Elementary competitive level are Colegio San Agustin, Mercedarian School, Miriam College, PWU-JASMS, San Pedro Poveda LC, Diliman Prep School, Golden Sunbeams Christian School, Holy Family, Holy Trinity Academy and St. Scholastica's College.

High School—Assumption College, Holy Family School, School of St. Anthony, Sienna College, St. Mary's College, St. Scholastica's College-Manila, St. Theresa's College-Quezon City, Antipolo Lady of Lourdes, Poveda Learning Centre, PWU-JASMS, San Antonio de Padua College-Pila, Laguna, San Beda College-Alabang A and St. James Academy of Malabon.

Vying in the developmental level are:

Elementary—Assumption College, Baesa Adventist Elementary School, Day Spring Academy, Sienna College and Southville International School.

High School—Assumption Antipolo, Notre Dame of Greater Manila, Our Lord's Grace Montessori, Paref-Rosehill School, SBC-Alabang B, St. Joseph School Fairview Inc., St. Scholastica's College-Manila B, St. Theresa's College-QC B, Angelicum College, Cavite School of St. Mark, Day Spring Academy, Holy Trinity Academy, Immaculata Heart of Mary, La Salle College Antipolo, New Era University, SBC-Rizal and Southville International School.

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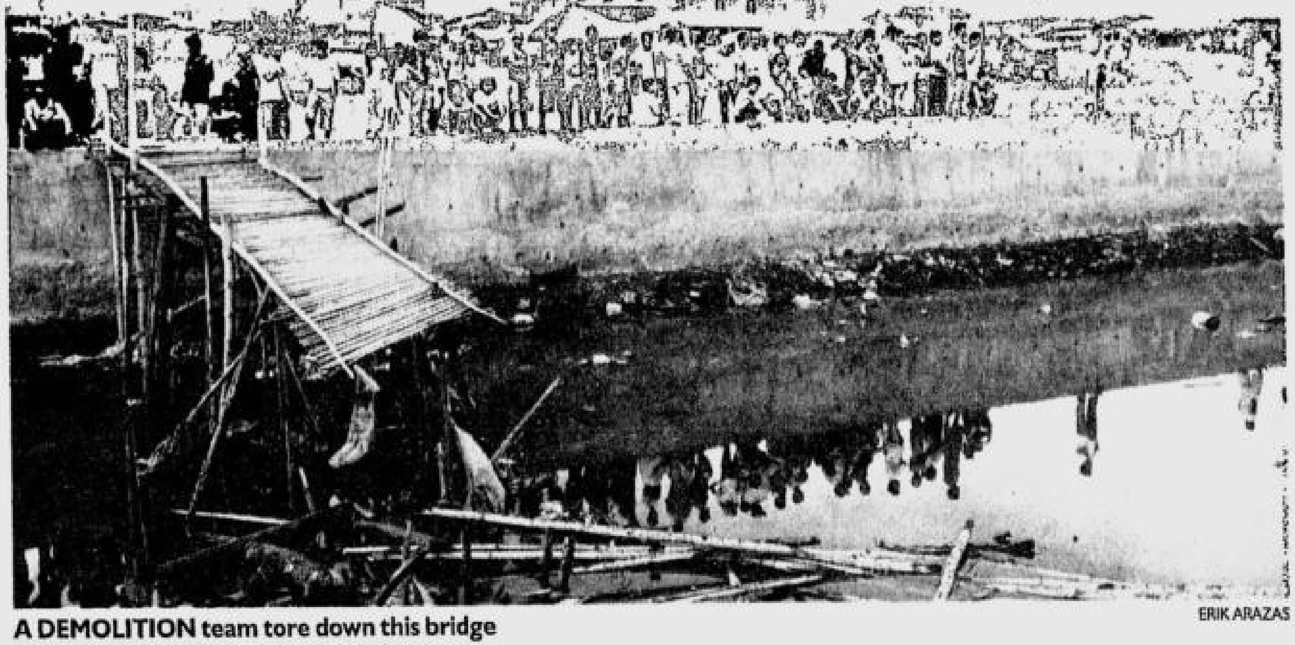
1 killed, 3 hurt in Parañaque City demolition job

Clash erupts between MMDA, Baclaran community residents



ERIK ARAZAS

A DEMOLITION team tore down this bridge leading to a Muslim community in Baclaran, resulting in a clash between residents and men from the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

By Jocelyn R. Uy and Tarra Quismundo

A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS killed and three others were seriously injured from gunshots when the demolition team of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority clashed yesterday morning with residents of a Muslim neighborhood in Baclaran, Parañaque City.

Supt. Ronald Estiles, city police chief, identified the fatality as Jamal Ampuan.

The victim died at the San Juan De Dios Hospital, where the other casualties were brought, late afternoon yesterday.

Victims

The others who were injured were identified by Muslim leaders as Alex Gapar, 35; Calid Camama, 27; and Anoar Abdul Latip, 13.

They were treated for gunshot wounds at the San Juan De Dios Hospital.

Caught

Dennis Abayon, reportedly an Army reservist assigned to the MMDA clearing operatives, is now under investigation after he was caught with a .45-caliber pistol near the Baclaran Church yesterday, Estiles said.

Footbridge

Bobby Esquivel, head of the MMDA Clearing Operations Group, told reporters yesterday they were tearing down around the wooden footbridge connecting the community of some 5,000 residents to Roxas Boulevard,

1 KILLED/ A18

2 fires hit Metro; 2 kids injured

By Nancy C. Carvajal and Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

TWO CHILDREN WERE HURT IN two separate fires that occurred after midnight and early morning yesterday in Caloocan City.

In Barangay Sto. Tomas in Pasig City, a 3-year-old boy playing with matches accidentally started a fire that razed their decades-old two-story house.

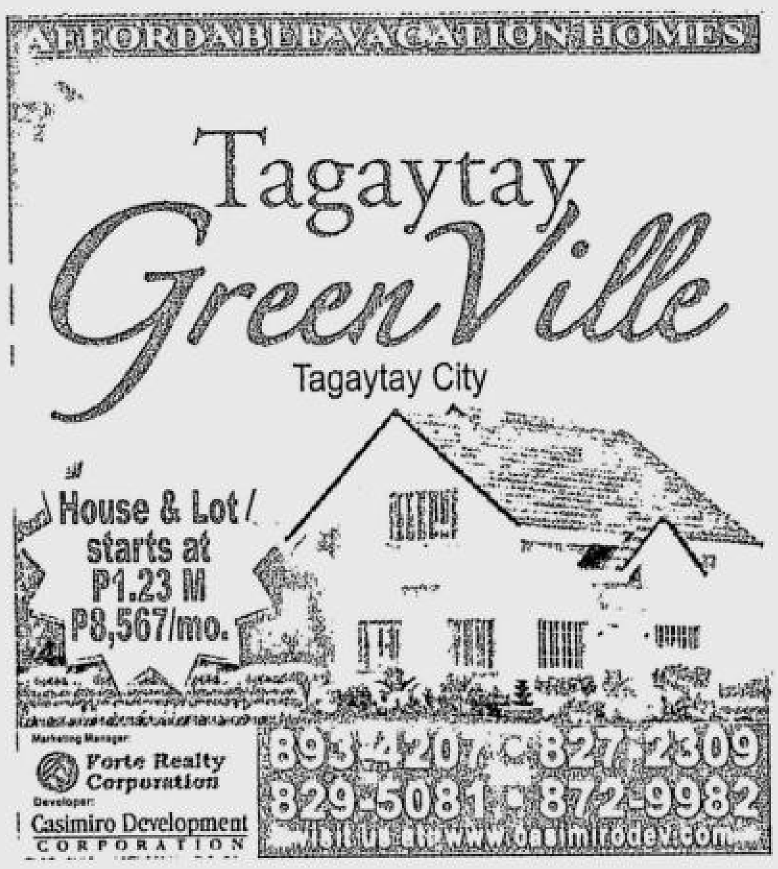
In Caloocan, meanwhile, arson investigator Senior Fire Officer 2 Zoilo Crisostomo said the latest fires in the city brought to four the number of incidents in the city since the beginning of the year.

The number of casualties in Caloocan fires since the beginning of the year now total five.

Damage caused by these incidents reached about P6 million, Crisostomo said. Some 50 families are now homeless because of the fire.

Crisostomo identified one of the latest victims as John Anthony Muello.

2 FIRES/ A18



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‘NBI could help link suspect to two slay cases’

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE SUSPECT IN THE MURDER of an ABS-CBN executive producer in November could also be involved in the brutal killing of a talent scout.

An agent of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) said yesterday the sister of murder victim Winifredo Parlan, 36, of No. 248 Sto. Rosario, Plainview, Mandaluyong City, said suspect Alfie Cabatuando was her brother's boyfriend and the prime suspect in the killing.

Cabatuando is now detained at the Quezon City Police District Criminal Investigation Unit for allegedly stabbing to death "Pinoy Dream Academy" producer Joselito Siervo in his home.

The suspect allegedly withdrew later P18,000 from the victim's ATM account.

Special Investigator Armand Eleazar of the NBI Anti Kidnapping, Hijacking, Armed Robbery Division, said Parlan's family sought the bureau's assistance after the victim was killed in May.

Eleazar said that according to witnesses, an irked Parlan paid for Cabatuando's tricycle fare around 8 p.m. on May 11, 2006 before they entered the victim's house.

Members of Parlan's family discovered the crime around 7 p.m. the following day when they noticed the victim's face was covered with a pillow.

"When they removed the pillow, they discovered that Parlan's forehead was bashed in," Eleazar said.

Eleazar added that a neighbor saw the suspect leave the victim's house with a backpack on the night of the crime.

The victim, who also worked as personnel manager of Marketplace in Mandaluyong City, lost around P180,000 in cash, his cell phone, and an attache case containing important documents.

STREET MINSTREL

A familiar sight along Katipunan Avenue in Quezon City is this man who makes afternoons more pleasant by playing popular tunes on his guitar for passersby. RAFFY LERMA

Casinos not allowed in Pasig City, says Eusebio

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

SAYING HE HAD NOT ISSUED A permit for any gambling facility in the city, Pasig Mayor Vicente Eusebio has ordered an investigation of allegations that a newly constructed building beside a restaurant strip in the city had been set up for casino operations.

"I will not allow any gambling den in the city. I have not issued a permit and I will not issue a permit for a casino," Eusebio told the INQUIRER yesterday.

Barangay Kapasigan kagawad Victorina Obina had earlier raised a warning about the alleged operation of a casino beside the restaurant strip Metrowalk on Meralco Avenue. The building stands in front of a satellite office of the Eastern Police District.

Obina said he got the information about its operations from his friends at Metrowalk.

Staff members of the Metrowalk administration told the INQUIRER that the building was already outside their jurisdiction and that they knew nothing about the alleged casino.

"This is all about the dignity of our city. We are just recovering from the stigma caused by the discovery of shabu restaurants last year," Obina said.

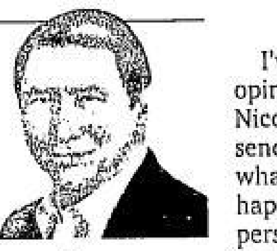
The two-story building looks new, with its fresh coat of white paint. The ground floor is still relatively unfurnished. Workers on the site, however, refused to talk about what facility was being built there. District Mobile Force chief Supt. Lazardo Lumagbas, whose office is right in front of the building, said he was told the building would soon open as a "leisure club."

Eusebio, however, said the policemen who inspected the building yesterday found nothing in the building to show casino games were being played there.

Justice Secretary Gonzalez's guts

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo



THE COURT OF APPEALS' RULing on the Daniel Smith custody issue is neither here not there.

It was issued to please both parties in the controversy: "Nicole," the alleged rape victim, and the government that wanted the rape convict in US hands. In street parlance, the ruling was "*bakla*." And that also describes the state of our judicial system.

* * *

Many people hate the guts of Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez because he speaks his mind on controversial issues.

You may hate the guy, but you admire his courage for voicing out his opinion even if it means getting all the flak. He's no pansy like some judges or justices who make decisions based on the prevailing public opinion. Okay, the guy could be wrong in his opinions. "Wrong" is a relative term. What is wrong today could become right tomorrow.

Remember, the great Sen. Claro M. Recto was hated for his nationalistic views. Everybody thought he was wrong. But Recto's views have become right in the present perspective.

Gonzalez is like Recto. He may yet prove everybody wrong in the future. Right now, we need more Raul Gonzalezes in the government service-men or women who stand up for their convictions.

* * *

I've received hate mail for my opinion on the controversial Nicole rape case! One e-mail sender even said that he hoped what happened to Nicole would happen to my daughter. To that person, I have this reply: If what happened to Nicole happened to one of my daughters (there are several of them), I would tell her to shut up because she had it coming to her.

When you sleep with a crocodile, be prepared to get eaten. Why should my daughter, if she got into that situation, cry rape when she went willingly with the guy who supposedly raped her?

If my daughter said she was drunk at the time, I would tell her that drunkenness is the refuge of those who have committed a grave mistake while being under the influence. A drunk knows exactly what he's doing. What he doesn't have is inhibition. Under our laws, being drunk is not an excuse for committing a crime.

For reactions, please write me at isumbongmokaytulfo@yahoo.com

METROBRIEFS

Tug-of-war

PASIG Mayor Vicente Eusebio has finally stepped in to resolve the tug-of-war for the chairmanship of Barangay Sta. Lucia in the city. "I have already appealed to acting chair Juan Ilagan to step down and honor the temporary restraining order (TRO) from the court," he told the INQUIRER. But yesterday afternoon, Ilagan and his supporters remained at the upper floor of the three-story Barangay Hall. Followers of barangay chair Fernando Tesorero's supporters have also been occupying the Health Center since the standoff began. Eusebio swore in Ilagan as acting chair last month after the Office of the Ombudsman dismissed Tesorero for alleged grave misconduct and dishonesty. But Tesorero managed to secure a TRO from the Court of Appeals stopping the dismissal. Ilagan already asked the CA to lift the TRO but the motion was denied, city legal officer Carlos Abesamis told the INQUIRER yesterday.

Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

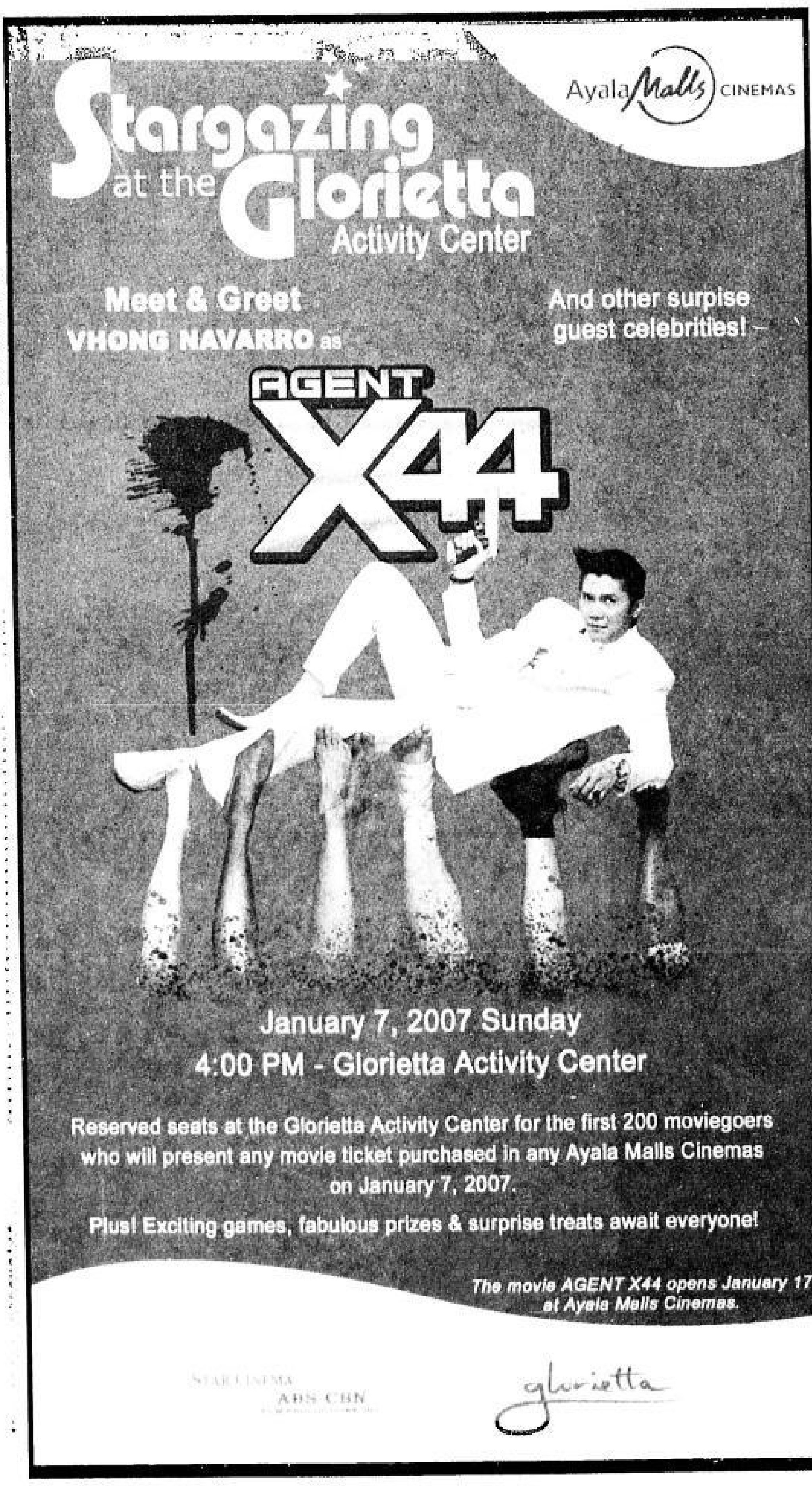
Brutal end

HOMICIDE investigators are eyeing robbery as the motive behind the brutal killing of two women in Tondo, Manila the other night. The victims were identified as Angie Binuya, of Unit 4, 1315 Cavite St., Tondo, Manila; and Genlen de Torres, of Unit 5, 1315 Cavite St., Tondo, Manila. An investigation conducted by SPO3 Danilo Vidad of the Manila Police District Homicide Section showed that the victims were last seen on Wednesday night with their friend Teresa Estrera at a KTV bar in Blumentritt. Vidad said the victims went home around 4 a.m. on Thursday and slept at De Torres' house. Witnesses saw the suspect, an alias Jimboy Legaspi, coming out of the condominium unit two hours later, Vidad said. Binuya's nephew found the victims with their necks slashed and their ring fingers cut off when he checked on his aunt, Vidad added.

Margaux C. Ortiz

Las Piñas priority

LAS PIÑAS Mayor Imelda Aguilar said 1,000 volunteer street sweepers will be deployed in the city's main and secondary roads to maintain the city's cleanliness and zero waste management, the city government's priority program for 2007. Aguilar said the volunteers will work on two shifts in the morning and in the afternoon to ensure the health and safety of the residents as well as the environment.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STAR CINEMA ABS-CBN
glorietta

2 fires hit Metro; 2 kids injured

From page A17

He was hurt in the fire that broke out around 12:05 a.m. in a residential area in Phase 8, Package 14, Bagong Silang.

Crisostomo said the boy suffered severe burns on his face and body in the two-hour fire that left at least four families homeless.

The fire allegedly started in the house of one Arnold Vergara.

Estimated damage was placed at about half a million pesos.

Candles

The fire investigator said the cause of the fire was still being investigated though some of the neighbors said it could be due to unattended candles.

The other fire occurred around 8 a.m. yesterday, displacing 40 families and destroying at least 10 houses on Hizon Street between 8th and 9th Avenues in Caloocan City.

No one was reported hurt, but damage to property was placed at P1.5 million.

On Wednesday, some 50 families were displaced when a fire broke out in Barangay Sta. Quteria, Caloocan.

On Thursday, some P1 million worth of property went up in smoke when a fire broke out in a convenience store on the ground floor of a four-story building also in Bagong Silang.

Jose Canatoy, a resident, sustained second-degree burns while trying to save some belongings from their burning house, investigators said.

No escape

Two fire fighters were also reportedly injured and at least 30 families were affected.

The hour-long fire allegedly started in the house of one Amado Pendijijuco.

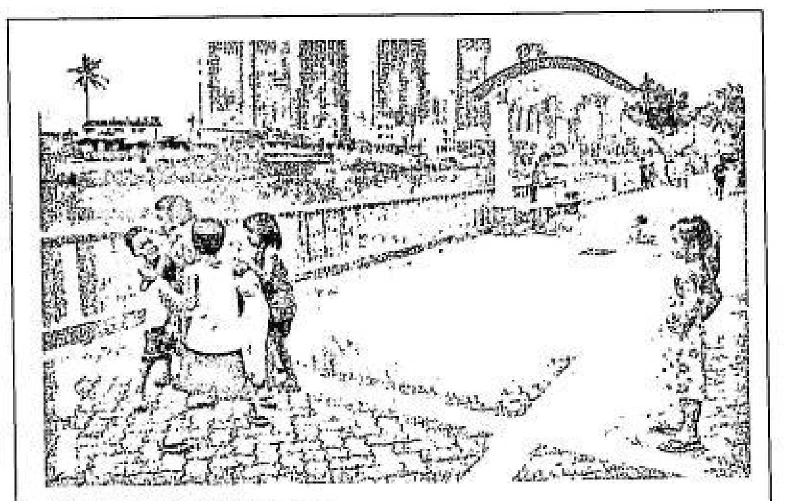
Nobody was hurt in the Pasig fire that began at 9:37 a.m. but it caused more than P500,000 worth of damage to property, FO1 Salvador Norberte told the INQUIRER.

Dangerous game

He said the boy was playing with matches in a bedroom on the upper floor of the house owned by his grandfather, Lamberto Lati, while his mother was on the ground floor of the house on Del Pilar Street.

The family managed to leave the burning house unharmed, the investigator added.

Firefighters managed to contain the fire at 9:55 a.m.



NEW PLAYGROUND

Children play in the new linear park at Barangay Barangka Itaas, Mandaluyong City. Eight linear parks in the city were opened to the public by Mayor Neptali M. Gonzales II with the support of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission.

1 killed, 3 hurt . . .

From page A17

fronting the Redemptorist Church at around 9:30 a.m. when shots were fired and bottles were hurled at them.

Response

This prompted the MMDA men to fire back, Esquivel said.

Pasay police chief Supt. Marietto Valerio said the MMDA team consisted of about 20 people in uniform and plainclothes.

But Muhammad Rasul, a member of the neighborhood's security task force, said the gunshots came from the MMDA operatives.

"Nobody fired from our community but some residents hurled bottles at the MMDA to prevent them from tearing down our bridge," Rasul said in an interview.

Access

The footbridge made of wood and bamboo was the community's only access to and from their homes, Rasul said.

The residents said they had requested the MMDA to postpone the demolition as Muslims from other parts of Metro Manila were going to their mosque yesterday to pray.

Senior Insp. Harry Dineros, chief of the Baclaran substation, said there was an exchange of gunfire between the two groups.

MMDA General Manager Robert Nacianceno, on the other hand, said yesterday the agency's personnel could not have initiated the violence in Baclaran.

Constant threat

He said MMDA personnel were, in fact, the ones under constant threat.

Nacianceno said four MMDA personnel had died and others injured in MMDA clearing operations for the past two years.

He said clearing crews were always warned never to go anywhere alone, as they were easy targets of vendors who might have been irked by the agency's clearing operations.

Easy to spot

"They (MMDA people) are in uniform and they are easily identifiable," said Nacianceno.

"Why would they place their lives in jeopardy by starting something?," the MMDA official added.

More coup rumors rattle Bangkok; calm urged

BANGKOK—THE NEW YEAR bombs that killed three people in the Thai capital were part of a concerted bid to undermine the post-coup government, the army chief said on Friday after rumors of another military putsch swept the jittery city.

"It is a movement to disrupt the national security, the society and the economy," Sonthi Boonyaratglin, who staged a Sept. 19 coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, said on army-run Channel 5 television.

Late on Thursday, as rumors of major movements of about 2,000 troops at 300 spots around Bangkok sped through its nine million inhabitants, Sonthi denied any plots to unseat the post-coup administration and the Council for National Security (CNS), as the coup command is now called.

As a measure of the panic, one theory was that the CNS was staging a coup against itself to boost its prestige and status after a problem-strewn three months in charge, which culminated in the unprecedented New Year's Eve bombings.

"These losers are doing everything they can to discredit the Sept. 19 coup. They are doing everything to show that the country is in chaos and the CNS can't restore peace as we have promised," Sonthi said.

"They are trying to tell the people that the CNS and the government have no credibility."

The streets were normal during the Friday morning rush-hour, but his appeal for calm looked unlikely to ease the concerns of investors, who dumped Thai stocks for the third straight day.

"Sentiment has been poor, with a fairly slim chance of seeing a rebound anytime soon. People are scared and panicky.

There has been so much bad news there has been broad panic selling," Chaiyaporn Nompitakcharoen of Bualuang Securities said.

Despite the government's insistence that politicians "who have lost power" were behind the blasts, a claim most Thais are taking as implicating ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the authorities appear to have no concrete evidence.

Sonthi even admitted on Friday that the masterminds would never be caught, as they would have already cut their ties with their operators on the ground. "I can't identify who they are yet, but the main focus is on the people who have lost political benefits," he said.

Army-installed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont told the country again on Friday to brace itself for a repeat of the bomb attacks, which other ministers said looked to be the work of dissident police and soldiers. *Reuters*

Explosives found in Spain's Basque region

MADRID—IN A FRESH BLOW to hopes of peace, police in Spain's Basque region Thursday found a car packed with explosives, five days after a bomb blast at Madrid airport claimed by the separatist group ETA.

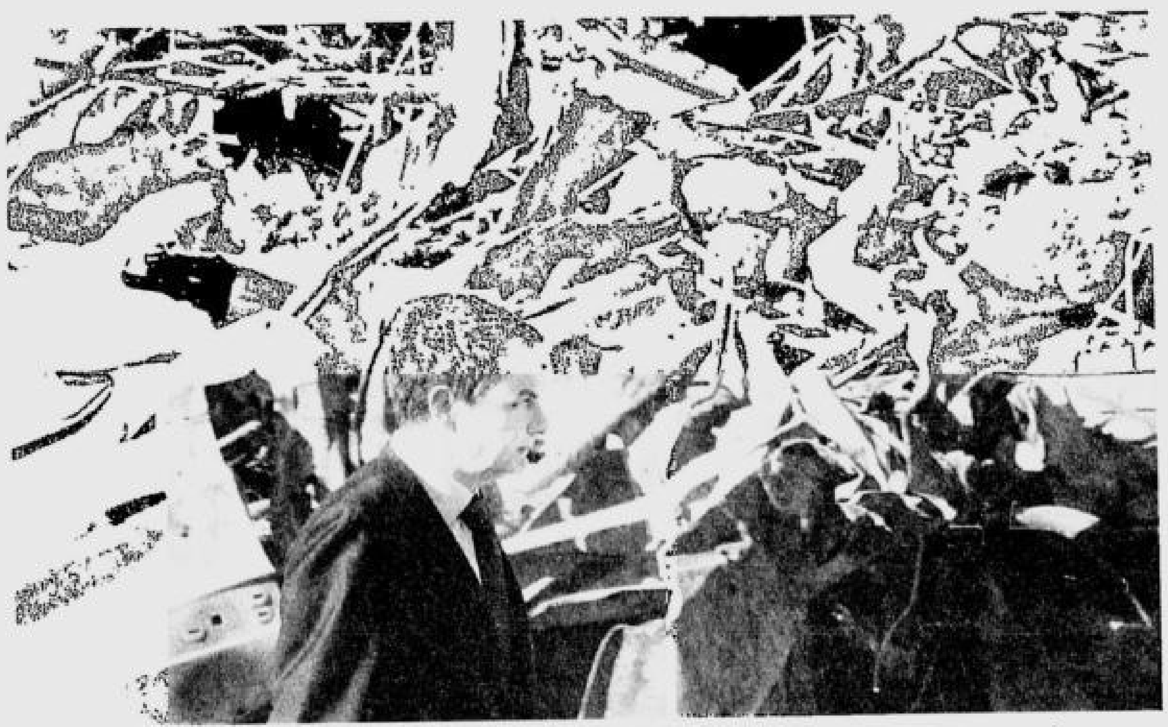
The vehicle contained some 90 kilos (200 pounds) of explosives which were "not primed to go off," a regional government spokesperson told AFP, adding that the car was probably abandoned by ETA members after a cache of detonators and explosives was found in the northern town of Amorebieta on Dec. 23.

The discovery of the explosives-laden car came just hours after Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero vowed to stamp out violence in the wake of Saturday's attack.

The huge blast in an airport carpark left one Ecuadoran man dead and a compatriot missing, presumed dead. Both men were sleeping in their cars when the bomb went off following three telephone warnings, one of which claimed responsibility in ETA's name.

A Spanish Royal Air Force plane flew home to Ecuador the remains of the dead man, 35-year-old Carlos Alonso Palate, on Thursday evening.

Palate was the first fatality in an ETA operation since 2003. The armed Basque separatists have been blamed for more than 850 deaths in a violent campaign for independence stretching back to 1968.



SPAIN'S Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero walks past debris as he tours the scene of utter destruction from the car bombing at the Terminal Four building in Madrid, Thursday, Jan. 4. AP

By Thursday afternoon the organization had still to issue a statement explaining the motives behind the airport blast, which broke a nine-month ceasefire that ETA had said would be permanent.

"I am more determined than ever to devote my energy to seeing an end to violence and achieving peace," Zapatero said as he visited the blast site.

All citizens "have a right to a life without bombs or violence," Zapatero said, who plans to revamp his antiterror strategy.

Madrid observed a day of mourning for Palate where a small group of people rallied outside the town hall to pay silent tribute.

There were similar small rallies in the Basque country and regional president Juan Jose Ibarretxe attended one in the administrative capital Vitoria.

Zapatero's spokesperson said he would address parliament—though "not imminently"—in response to demands from the main conservative opposition Popular Party (PP) to explain how his antiterrorist policy will now evolve.

The Socialist government had indicated a willingness to hold a dialogue with ETA and preparatory talks involving government intermediaries had been held both before and after the group's March 22 ceasefire announcement.

However, after the airport attack, Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba said the peace intitiative was "broken off, liquidated, finished," even as ETA's political wing Batasuna was insisting that the process was still alive. *AFP*

In US, embezzlement in many Catholic dioceses

A SURVEY BY RESEARCHERS AT Villanova University has found that a surprising 85 percent of Roman Catholic dioceses that responded had discovered embezzlement of church funds in the last five years, with 11 percent reporting that more than $500,000 had been stolen.

The Catholic Church has some of the most rigorous financial guidelines of any denomination, specialists in church ethics said, but the survey found that the guidelines are often ignored in parishes. And when no one is looking, the cash that goes into the collection plate does not always get deposited into the church's bank account.

"As a faith-based organization, we place a lot of trust in our folks," said Chuck Zech, a coauthor of the study and director of the Center for the Study of Church Management at Villanova University, in Pennsylvania.

"We think if you work for a church—you're a volunteer or a priest—the last thing on your mind is to do something dishonest," he said. "But people are people, and there's a lot of temptation there, and with the cash-based aspect of how churches operate, it's pretty easy."

Specialists in church ethics said they believe this is the first study to assess the extent of embezzlement in a denomination.

Officials at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops said they had seen the study, which was released just before Christmas and was first reported in the National Catholic Reporter, and were already considering ways that parishes could tighten their financial controls.

"The Villanova study does not come as a surprise," said Bishop Dennis M. Schnurr, treasurer of the bishops' conference. "This is something that the bishops in this country have been looking at for some time," said Schnurr, who heads the Duluth, Minn., diocese. "They are aware of a need to look for mechanisms that can assist parishes in accountability and transparency."

Zech and his coauthor, Robert West, a professor of accounting at Villanova, did not set out to look for embezzlement. They were conducting a study of internal financial controls in Catholic dioceses, and sent a battery of questions to chief financial officers in the nation's 174 Catholic dioceses; of them, 78 responded. Zech said he was surprised that so many dioceses had detected embezzlement. In 93 percent of those cases, police reports were filed.

Parishes and high schools handle many cash transactions, making them vulnerable to theft, the Villanova report notes. *NYT*

2007 could be world's warmest year

LONDON—DEEPENING DROUGHT in Australia. Stronger typhoons in Asia. Floods in Latin America.

British climate scientists predict that a resurgent El Niño climate trend combined with ever-higher levels of greenhouse gases could touch off a fresh round of ecological disasters—and make 2007 the world's hottest year on record.

"Even a moderate (El Niño) warming event is enough to push the global temperatures over the top," said Phil Jones, director of the Climatic Research unit at the University of East Anglia.

The warmest year on record is 1998, when the average global temperature was 0.52 degrees Celsius (1.2 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than the long-term average of 14 degrees C (57 F). Though such a change appears small, incremental differences can, for example, add to the ferocity of storms by evaporating more steam off the ocean.

There is a 60 percent chance that the average global temperature for 2007 will match or break that record, Britain's Meteorological Office said Thursday. The consequences of the high temperatures could be felt worldwide.

El Niño, which is now under way in the Pacific Ocean and is expected to last until May, occurs irregularly. But when it does, winters in southeast Asia tend to become milder, summers in Australia get drier, and Pacific storms can be more intense. The UN's Food Aid Organization has warned that rising temperatures could wreak agricultural havoc.

RIME frost and snow cover the buildings on the summit of Mount Washington in New Hampshire Jan. 3. The summit is 6,288 feet above sea level and is home to a weather station that faces some of the most brutal weather conditions in the United States. REUTERS

In Australia, which is struggling through its worst drought on record, the impact on local farmers could be devastating. The country already has registered its smallest wheat harvest in a decade, food prices are rising, and severe water restrictions have put thousands of farmers at risk of bankruptcy.

In other cases, El Niño's effects are more ambiguous. Rains linked to the phenomenon led to bumper crops in Argentina in 1998, but floods elsewhere in Latin America devastated subsistence farmers.

El Niño also can do some good. It tends to take the punch out of the Atlantic hurricane season by generating crosswinds that can rip the storms apart—good news for Florida's orange growers, for example.

"The short-term effects of global warming on crop production are very uneven," said Daniel Hillel, a researcher at Columbia University's Center for Climate Systems Research in New York. "I warn against making definitive predictions regarding any one season's weather."

What is clear is that the cumulative effect of El Niño and global warming are taking the Earth's temperatures to record-breaking heights.

"El Niño is an independent variable," Jones said. "But the underlying trends in the warming of the earth is almost certainly due to the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere."

Another more immediate effect of the rising temperatures may be political.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard is already under fire for refusing to link his country's drought to global warming. In Britain, Friends of the Earth campaign Director Mike Childs said the weather service's 2007 prediction "underlined the gap between the (British) government's rhetoric and action."

Other environmental groups said the new report added weight to the movement to control greenhouse gases.

It came only a day after the weather service reported that 2006 had been Britain's warmest year since 1659, and three months after Sir Nicholas Stern, a senior government economist, estimated that the effects of climate change could eventually cost nations 5 percent to 20 percent of global gross domestic product each year.

Figures for 2006 are not yet complete, but the weather service said temperatures were high enough to rank among the top 10 hottest years on record.

"The evidence that we're doing something very dangerous with the climate is now amassing," said Campaign Against Climate Change coordinator Philip Thornhill.

"We need to put the energy and priority (into climate change) that is being put into a war effort," he said. "It's a political struggle to get action done—and these reports help." *AP*

New WHO chief says women, Africa top focus

GENEVA—MARGARET CHAN took up her position as the new head of the World Health Organization on Thursday and said she wanted her leadership to be judged on how she helps improve the health of women and Africans.

CHAN AFP

The 59-year-old is the first Chinese to head a United Nations body. Chan was named director general of the WHO head two months ago following the unexpected death of her South Korean predecessor, Lee Jong-Wook.

"I want my leadership to be judged by the impact of our work on the health of two populations: women and the people of Africa," she told reporters.

She said this did not necessarily mean new structures and policies, but that existing schemes such as the WHO's Family and Child Health program could be used as yardsticks to measure progress.

Chan, who is described as "authoritarian but efficient" by one diplomat who has followed her rise, also highlighted bird flu as an area of key concern.

A new pandemic would have disastrous consequences, especially in countries with weak healthcare systems and where the population is already affected by diseases such as HIV/AIDS, she said.

"The next pandemic, if it occurs, will be very devastating … we are very concerned of the likelihood of a pandemic," she warned.

Chan won plaudits in 1997 for her tough stance on an outbreak of avian flu in Hong Kong, when she served as the Chinese territory's health care chief. She ordered a mass cull of over one million chickens which, though initially criticized, was subsequently vindicated with international praise.

Her relationship with Beijing will now be closely watched by the rest of the world at a time of growing Chinese political and economic influence.

When nominated in November, she insisted she would be impartial and not beholden to China, which has come under fire for its perceived lack of transparency and cooperation with the WHO over the extent of bird flu within its borders.

Returning to this point on Thursday, she said that she felt her background made her uniquely placed to deal with the government in Beijing on sensitive issues.

"I truly believe that of all people I would be in a better position to discuss with the Chinese authorities the sharing of specimens and of examples," Chan said.

The new chief of the WHO, which is governed by its 193 member states, said the organization must change in order to meet the concerns of its members, but that "no upheaval, no revolution" was on the cards.

"We need to have an organization which is … transparent, accountable and nimble," she said. *AFP*

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS
Intramuros, Manila

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

Sealed applications for eligibility and bid documents for the supply and delivery of ballot paper for use in the May 14, 2007 elections shall be received at the COMELEC Session Hall, 8th floor, Palacio del Gobernador, Intramuros, Manila, on January 22, 2007 at 10:00 A.M., at which place, date and time, said sealed bids shall be opened in the presence of the members of the COMELEC Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), representatives of the COMELEC, Commission on Audit, Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting, the participating bidders and the public, with an approved budget of two hundred ninety seven million (Php 297,000,000.00) pesos, charged against the appropriations for the Preparatory Activities in connection with the May 14, 2007 National and Local Elections.

A pre-bid conference shall be held on January 8, 2007, 10:00 A.M. at the COMELEC Session Hall, 8th floor, Palacio del Gobernador, Intramuros, Manila.

Bid documents and specifications may be obtained during regular office hours, beginning January 2, 2007, from the Property Division upon payment with the COMELEC Cash Division, of a non-refundable amount of ten thousand (Php 10,000.00) pesos.

Bids shall be accompanied by a Bidder's Bond equivalent to one per centum (1%) of the offer, bid, tender or quotation, in the form of cash or manager's/cashier's check payable to "Commission on Elections".

Full delivery shall be made within thirty (30) days from receipt of the Notice of Award except when so indicated in the Bidder's Tender.

The COMELEC reserves the right to reject any or all bids, waive any formal defect contained therein, and accept the lowest complying and reasonable bid that is most advantageous to the COMELEC. Likewise, COMELEC reserves the right to review the qualifications of the bidders after the bidding and before the contract is executed. Should such review uncover any change in the situation of the bidder to materially downgrade the substance of such statements, the COMELEC shall disqualify the bidder upon due notice without any obligation whatsoever on the part of the COMELEC for any expense or loss that may be incurred by the bidder in the preparation of its bid.

December 28, 2006.

JOSE M. TOLENTINO, JR.
Chairman
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI—Jan. 6, 2007)

The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

Democrats take control of Congress

HOUSE Speaker Nancy Pelosi, delivers her remarks at a gathering celebrating her election as the first woman speaker of the House of Representatives and second in line to the presidency, Jan. 4, in Washington. AP

WASHINGTON—IN A DAY OF TRANSITION AND pageantry, exultant Democrats on Thursday took control of both houses of Congress for the first time in a dozen years and elected the first woman speaker of the House.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California took the speaker's gavel at 2:08 p.m. from Rep. John A. Boehner of Ohio, the Republican leader, whom she defeated by a vote of 233-202, the margin of the new Democratic majority. The House floor and the packed galleries erupted in cheers when the vote was formally announced. Even Republicans grudgingly acknowledged the unprecedented nature of the day on which a woman ascended to power on Capitol Hill by rising as one to applaud her.

"This is an historic moment," Pelosi said in her first remarks as speaker of the 110th Congress. "It's an historic moment for the Congress. It's an historic moment for the women of America. It is a moment for which we have waited for over 200 years."

Seventy-one women will serve in the House, a record.

Earlier in the day, on the other side of the Capitol dome, Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., became majority leader following his party's one-seat victory margin in the November elections.

Vice President Dick Cheney, in his constitutional role as president of the Senate, dutifully swore in the members, including 10 new senators, only one of them a Republican, Bob Corker of Tennessee.

Both Reid and Pelosi promised a new era of cooperation after years of partisan passion and gridlock. "Guided by the spirit of bipartisanship," Reid said, "Democrats are ready to take this country in a new direction."

But there were signs, too, of divisions among Democrats over how hard to push to undo the fruits of 12 years of Republican rule in the Congress and six years under President Bush.

In her remarks, Pelosi delivered the obligatory promise of partnership with Republicans. But she immediately added a blunt warning to Bush on the war in Iraq.

The first order of business for the new Democratic-led House was a series of measures designed to more tightly regulate relations between lawmakers and lobbyists. Next week, they plan to start a 100-hour blitz of legislation to raise the minimum wage, lift restrictions on federal financing of embryonic stem cell research and allow the government to negotiate price cuts with pharmaceutical companies for the Medicare prescription drug program, among other matters. House Democrats also plan to pass legislation cutting interest rates on student loans and rolling back subsidies for oil and gas producers.

In an early sign of bipartisanship, Democratic Sen. Max Baucus of Montana and Sen. Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, on Thursday introduced a bill to repeal the individual alternative minimum tax, which is imposing an increasingly heavy tax burden on middle-income taxpayers. *NYT*

For Democrats, a choice: Forward or reverse

WASHINGTON—DEMOCRATS REALIZED their political and legislative dream Thursday. Now they must face reality.

As they take control of the House and Senate, members of the new majority must reconcile diverse ideological factions within their ranks and make a fundamental choice. They can spend their energy trying to reverse what they see as the flaws of the Bush administration and a dozen years in which conservative philosophy dominated Congress. Or they can accept the rightward tilt of that period and grudgingly concede that big tax cuts, deregulation, restrictions on abortion and other Republican-inspired changes are now a permanent part of the legislative framework.

The competing drives were on display amid the constitutional hoopla on Thursday and the emotion surrounding Rep. Nancy Pelosi's election as speaker, a position filled until now by the likes of Sam Rayburn, Joseph Cannon and Nicholas Longworth—men whose names adorn nearby House office buildings. "We have broken the marble ceiling," Pelosi said after she was handed the gavel.

In a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus earlier in the day, Pelosi made her own allusions to the competing tugs on Democrats, noting the party was rooted in its traditions but not hostage to the past. She vowed a new direction "for all the people, not just the privileged few," a reflection of the leadership's political and policy calculation that Democrats need to champion the average guy.

"The agenda we have is about restoring economic security to a very vulnerable middle class," said Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, chair of the Democratic Caucus. "The real activity will be in those areas."

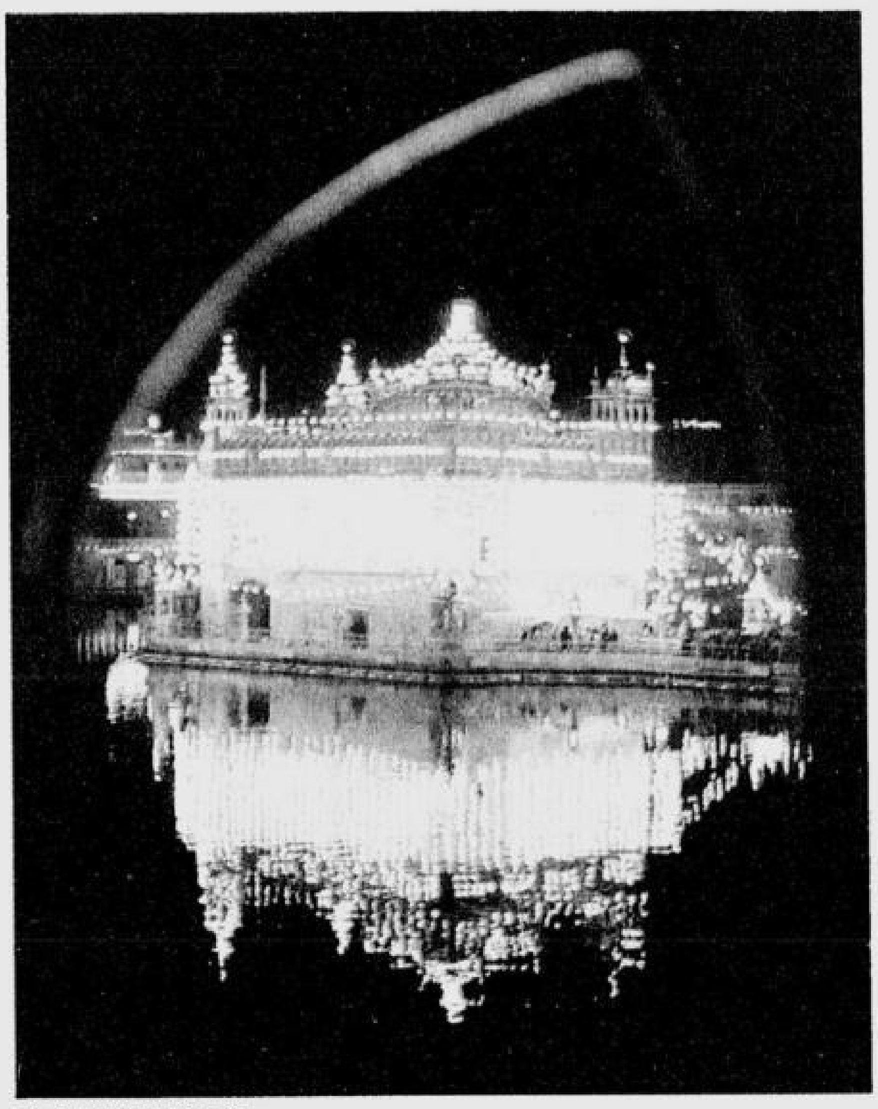
Yet many Democrats contend that President Bush and the Republican Congress that was his partner moved the dial too far to the right in many cases. And they believe it will be the work of Democrats to make a significant course correction.

"I think there are a lot of things the people of America want changed," said Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., the new chair of the Judiciary Committee and a tough critic of some Bush policies. He and others made clear that the new direction has to begin with American policy in Iraq.

But Democrats are in no rush to engage in a fight with Bush over the ideological centerpiece of his domestic policy, his tax cuts. And they have showed no inclination to wade back into the abortion issue, despite its potency among many of their supporters.

"We have to keep our eye on the average American family and sort of push aside the interest groups left, right and center," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y. "The world has changed, and it demands new solutions, not the old Democrat and Republican nostrums."

New York Times News Service



SIKH HOLY SITE

Sikhs gather on the causeway at Sikhism's holiest site the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Jan. 4, on the eve of the 341th Birth Anniversary of Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh,the tenth and last of the Ten Gurus of Sikhism. AFP

Car seats for infants often fail in crashes

WASHINGTON—CAR SEATS for infants often fail to withstand the impact when a vehicle is struck by another from the side, according to laboratory tests conducted by Consumer Reports.

Of a dozen models tested in simulations of such impacts, 10 failed, some "disastrously," the magazine reports in its February issue.

The seats have a base that is installed in the car, and a detachable carrier in which the baby is strapped. In the simulations, the seats often separated from the base and skidded across the laboratory, Consumer Reports said.

The seats are rear-facing models of the kind intended for infants up to 1 year old, or about 22 pounds. The government requires manufacturers to test such seats for head-on collisions, but not for broadside crashes, which kill about 30 infants a year in the United States.

It is not clear from the tests how many of those deaths could be avoided with better seats: The magazine tested the seats at 38 miles an hour, the speed at which the government tests cars for protection of adults.

Nicole R. Nason, administrator of the government's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said the agency was working to develop its own infant-seat tests for broadside crashes.

The magazine also found flaws in a much acclaimed system, required by the government in all new cars since 2002, that helps anchor baby seats to cars. Indeed, some child seats performed worse with this Latch hardware than when held in place by seat belts. The traffic safety agency said it would hold a public meeting next month to discuss how to improve the Latch system. *NYT*

Half of Britain's warships to be mothballed, report says

LONDON—ALMOST HALF OF the British Royal Navy's warships are to be mothballed as the Ministry of Defense tries to slash costs, the Daily Telegraph reported Friday.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's government has admitted that 13 warships are in a state of "reduced readiness" and six further destroyers and frigates are being proposed for cuts, the paper said.

The move comes as ministers reportedly try to cut the defense budget by 250 million pounds (371 million euros, $486 million) and amid major armed forces commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"What this means is that we are now no better than a coastal defense force or a fleet of dugout canoes.

"The Dutch now have a better navy than us," said an unnamed senior officer.

It is likely that the six destroyers and frigates will eventually be sold or scrapped, while there are also fears that two new aircraft carriers promised in 1998 will never be built, the paper said.

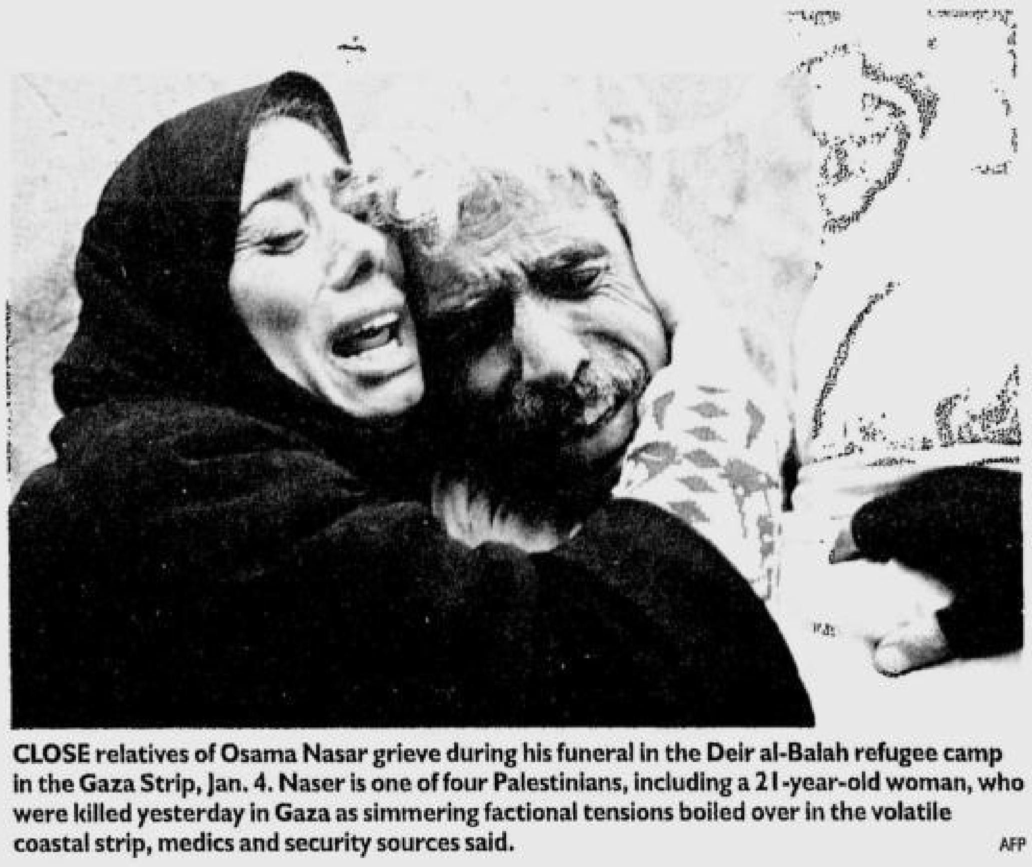
Unnamed MoD sources told the paper it was possible that the navy would discontinue one of its major commitments around the world to save money.

It also quoted unnamed defense sources saying that two of eight destroyers on the order books will not be bought and added that one of Britain's three major ports was under threat.

The former head of the Royal Navy, Sir Alan West, told the Sunday Telegraph last week that the government was putting British interests at risk by reshaping the armed forces to wage long-term campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The MoD was behaving "like these tinpot countries" which fail to invest in major equipment programs and was running the risk of turning the armed forces into "a gendarmerie." This latest embarrassing report of defense underfunding comes the day after the government was criticized over claims that it was failing to provide decent accommodation for troops.

An MoD spokesperson said that "no decisions" had yet been taken on the future of the ships and labeled the report of a possible base closure as "complete speculation." *AFP*



CLOSE relatives of Osama Nasar grieve during his funeral in the Deir al-Balah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, Jan. 4. Naser is one of four Palestinians, including a 21-year-old woman, who were killed yesterday in Gaza as simmering factional tensions boiled over in the volatile coastal strip, medics and security sources said. AFP

Israel raids Ramallah, kills four

RAMALLAH, WEST BANK—ISRAELI forces mounted a rare raid into the West Bank city of Ramallah on Thursday, killing four Palestinians, while a spasm of factional fighting among Palestinians in Gaza left six dead.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas leader, held late-night talks in Gaza to try to defuse tensions, Palestinian officials said.

It was their first meeting in about two months.

The Ramallah operation cast a shadow over a summit Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held a few hours later in Egypt to explore restarting stalled Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

Smoke rose over central Ramallah after Israeli armored vehicles and bulldozers, slamming aside parked cars near the main Manara Square, pushed into the city to carry out what an Israeli army spokesperson called "routine arrest activity." She said four wanted men had been detained.

The raid was the biggest in Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian government, since May, when four Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces. Palestinians responded to the latest incursion with gunfire and rocks as pedestrians fled for safety.

Hospital officials said three Palestinians were killed outright and a fourth died later in hospital. At least 25 other people wounded before Israeli forces withdrew.

"This operation proves that Israeli calls for peace and security are false," Abbas said.

In fighting between rival Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip, a policeman loyal to the governing Hamas movement was killed by gunmen from Abbas's Fatah faction.

Blaming the shooting on bodyguards of Colonel Mohammed Ghareeb of the Preventive Security Service, Hamas gunmen then besieged his home, killing the officer and four of his men and wounding his wife, in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya.

Clashes also erupted in the nearby Jabalya refugee camp and at least 30 people were wounded, hospital officials said.

Violence has surged in Gaza since Abbas challenged Hamas by calling on Dec. 16 for early parliamentary and presidential elections after talks on forming a unity government failed.

Haniyeh said earlier he and Abbas were hoping to meet.

"I demand all gunmen withdraw from the streets and end all armed displays immediately," he told reporters. "I ask all parties to resort only to dialogue to resolve political differences." Gazans said they feared that Ghareeb's death would lead to a sharp spike in internal fighting. Local radio talk shows were flooded with calls from residents appealing to Fatah and Hamas to pull back from the brink. *Reuters*

SAMSUNG
602

WHAT'S INSIDE

Ace jumper sets sights on Olympic medal/A22

SPORTS

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Editor **Teddyvic S. Melendres**

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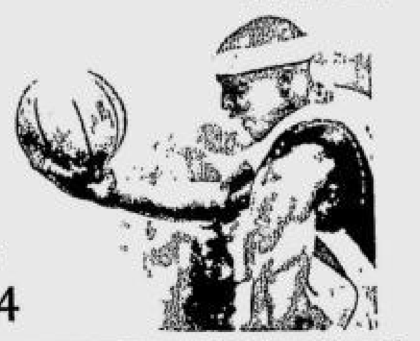
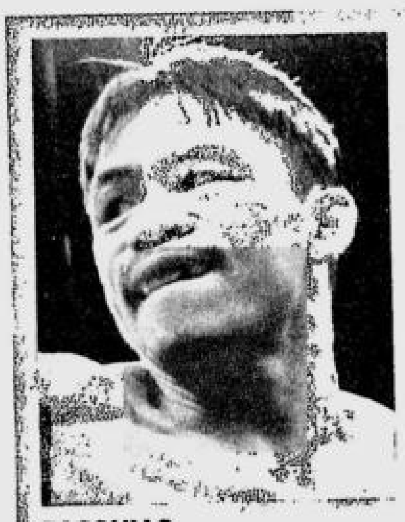
Pistons take sting out of ailing Hornets/A24



Manny, 7 others named PSA Athletes of the Year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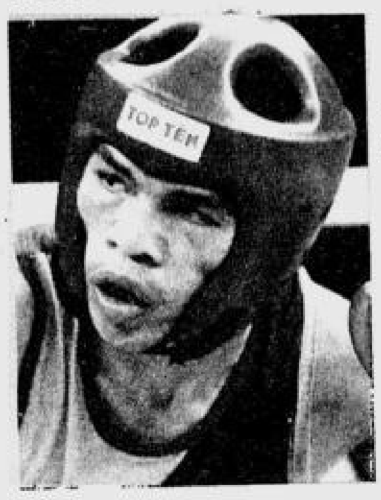
PAYLA

GABICA

CATALAN

BAYANI NG LAHI: Manny Pacquiao, for the sheer impact of his ring exploits

Sportswriting fraternity also honors 3 reigning world champs, 4 Asian Games gold medalists

EIGHT GALLANT MEN, WITH a ferocious warrior at the helm, stood at the forefront of a season rich in success and high points for Philippine sports.

Boxing superstar Manny Pacquiao, pool champions Efren "Bata" Reyes and Ronnie Alcano, bowler Biboy Rivera and Asian Games gold medallists Joan Tipon, Violito Payla, Antonio Gabica and Rene Catalan did the country proud with their respective exploits and, together, helped make 2006 a truly memorable one for the entire Filipino people.

Their heroic deeds deserved nothing but the highest honor from the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA), which selected all eight personalities as its 2006 Athletes of the Year in the PSA-SMC Annual Awards on January 18 at the Mall of Asia.

The move was another unprecedented one for the 58-year-old association after it bestowed on Team Philippines the Athlete of the Year honor in 2005 following the country's historic, first ever overall championship in the Southeast Asian Games.

On top of the highest award to be presented to the eight sportsmen, Pacquiao will also be the recipient of the once-in-a-lifetime PSA Bayani ng Lahi trophy in recognition of his inspiring victories over Mexican boxing legend Erik Morales that brought boundless joy to an adoring nation and touched the lives of many Filipinos, one way or the other.

"The PSA was one in choosing all eight of them as deserving of the Athlete of the Year honor," said PSA President Jimmy Cantor of Malaya.

"It is with deep pride and honor for the association to recognize them in a simple but meaningful rite two weeks from now," he added.

Top sports officials of the country led by Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) chairman William "Butch" Ramirez and Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco are expected to join the honorees during the affair that starts at 3 p.m.

Pacquiao, a three-time recipient of the Athlete of the Year honor from 2002-04, made a strong case for the award with his stirring knockout wins over Morales in two action-packed fights in Las Vegas that generated records in both pay-per-view and live attendance.

Not to be outdone, Reyes did his thing by claiming two out of the four legs at stake in the San Miguel Asian 9-Ball Tour. He also won the biggest prize purse ever in billiards—a total of $500,000—when he topped the IPT World 8-Ball Championship in Las Vegas, Nevada, before teaming up with bosom buddy Francisco "Django" Bustamante to take the inaugural World Cup of Pool in South Wales.

Alcano's magical ride in the World Pool Championship in Manila was just as exhilarating, so did Rivera's perfect 300-game in the final of the World Men's Bowling Championship formerly known as the World FIQ.

Also unforgettable was the Asiad adventure of Payla, Tipon, Gabica and Catalan in far away Qatar, where each won a gold medal that ensured the country's best finish in the quadrennial meet since 1962.

Apart from the eight Athlete of the Year recipients, major awards will also be given to six other individuals, namely, James Yap (pro basketball), Ken Bono (amateur basketball), Juvic Pagunsan (golf), Santy Barnachea (cycling), jockey Jonathan B. Hernandez (horseracing) and Real Spicy (horseracing).

The rest of the honorees will be made known in the coming days.

Established in 1949, the PSA is the oldest media organization in the country and has a present membership of about 100 sportswriters from the national broadsheets and tabloids.

The list of awardees

ATHLETES OF THE YEAR—Manny Pacquiao, Efren "Bata" Reyes, Ronnie Alcano, Biboy Rivera, Joan Tipon, Violito Payla, Antonio Gabica, Rene Catalan.

BAYANI NG LAHI—Manny Pacquiao

MAJOR AWARDS—James Yap (pro basketball), Ken Bono (amateur basketball), Juvin Pagunsan (golf), Santy Barnachea (cycling), Jonathan B. Hernandez (horseracing) and Real Spicy (horseracing).

IBF willing to sanction Pacquiao-Klassen

KLASSEN: Possible foe

By Salven L. Lagumbay
Contributor

A POSSIBLE BOUT BETWEEN International Boxing Federation (IBF) super featherweight champion Malcolm Klassen and superstar Manny Pacquiao would be sanctioned if and when the bout takes place in Macau, China, on April 28.

Klassen (19-3-2, 10 KOs) who hails from South Africa, holds the IBF 130-lb title, and is reportedly being short-listed as a possible opponent for Pacquiao.

IBF Championship Chair Lindsey Tucker, in a message to this writer from his office in New Jersey, informed that the IBF "would love to have that fight," citing that Pacquiao is not unfamiliar with the IBF having been its former super bantam title holder.

Pacquiao had reigned as the IBF super bantam titlist from 2001 to 2003, winning the title with a sixth-round TKO over overwhelming favorite Lehlo

IBF/ A22

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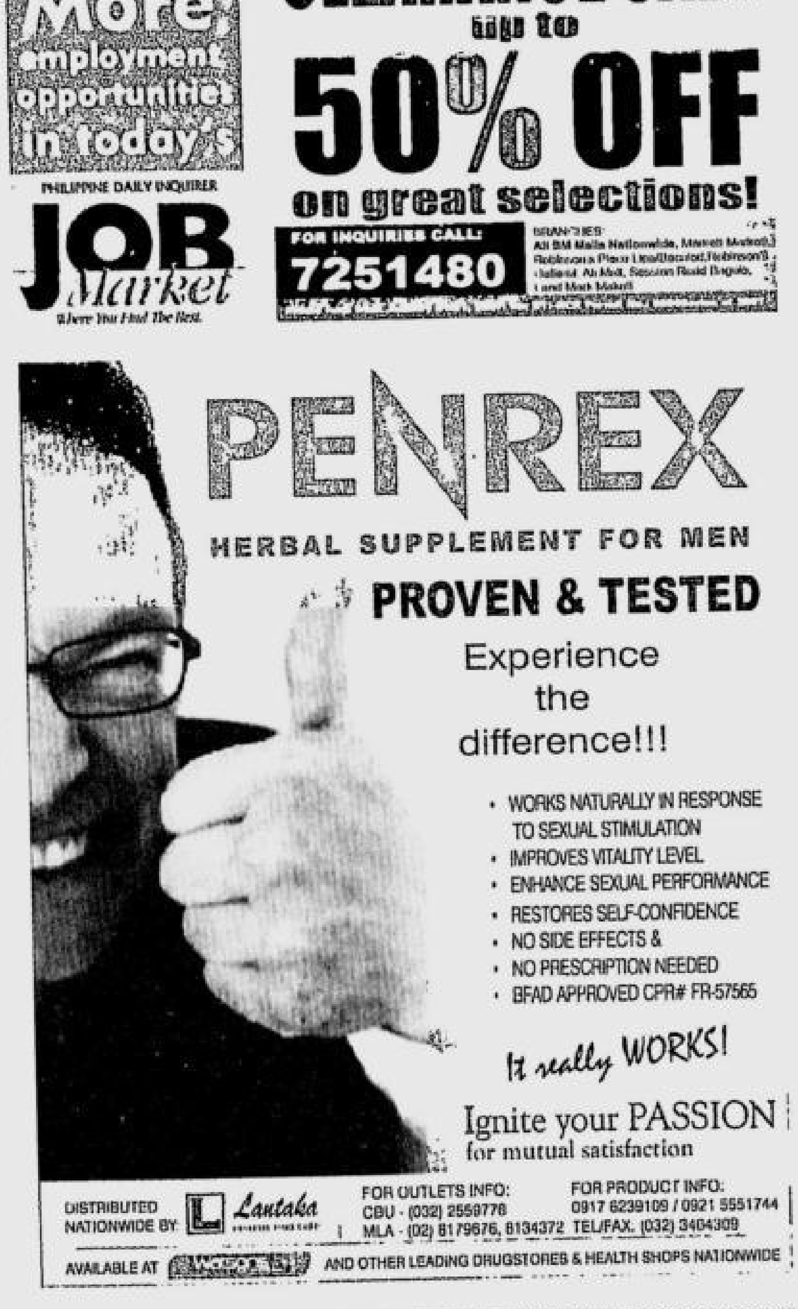
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Seven new players named to Asean-bound RP Team

SKIPPER ALY BORROMEO AND FIL-BRITISH MIDfielders Chris Greatwich and James Younghusband are spearheading the 22-man Philippine Team that will see action in the Asean Football Championships, which kicks off Jan. 12 in Bangkok and Singapore.

Seven players, who were not part of the RP Team in the qualifying stage in Bacolod City, have also been added to the lineup for the eight-nation biennial tournament.

In an effort to fill the dent left by top striker Philip Younghusband, who scored six goals in qualifying, national coach Aris Caslib has recalled Alvin Valeroso, the top Filipino scorer in the 2006 Asian Challenge Cup, and University of St. La Salle's Arnie Pasinabo.

Other new additions

The other new additions to the team are midfielders Jerome Orcullo and Mariano del Rosario, goalkeepers Archie Bayquin and Alvin Montañez and defender Jan Michael Benedicto.

They join holdovers Emelio Caligdong, Dan Padernal, Anton del Rosario, Phil Greatwich, Alvin Ocampo, Japeth Sablon, Henry Brauner, Anto Gonzales, Jeff Liman, Ariel Zerrudo and Ali Go.

"The team is a bit weaker without Phil but local substitutes and the rest of the team are highly motivated to surpass our good performance in Bacolod," Philippine Football Federation president Juan Miguel Romualdez told the INQUIRER.

Underdogs, but confident

"We know we are the underdogs but we are more confident now."

The Nationals flew to Singapore yesterday to play a series of tune-up matches with the Singaporean Olympic, Under-23 and senior teams starting this Sunday.

Malaysia, a semifinalist in 2004, will be the first assignment for the Filipino booters on Jan. 12. In the 2004 tournament, the Malaysians thrashed the Filipinos, 4-1.

Three-time winners Thailand will be heavily favored when it meets the Philippines on Jan. 14. The Filipinos wrap up their group assignment two days later when they battle the Myanmarese side, which prevailed 1-0 in its previous meeting with the RP booters two years ago.

Co-host Singapore, also the defending champion, is grouped with Indonesia, Vietnam and Laos, the top team in the Asean Qualifiers. *Cedelf P. Tupas, Inquirer Visayas*

The RP team will be without Phil Younghusband (right).

Roach keen on Cebu 'World Cup' showdowns

By Salven L. Lagumbay
Contributor

ROACH: Excited

TRAINER FREDDIE Roach, who has refused to handle Oscar De la Hoya in order to stick close to Manny Pacquiao, yesterday called the upcoming "World Cup" of Boxing in Cebu City a "very exciting" event.

The March 4 event, a joint promotion of Oscar De la Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions and the ALA-SGG group of Antonio Aldeguer and Sammy Gello-ani, will feature three world title bouts, one inter-continental showdown, and three non-title battles pitting Filipino fighters against Mexican counterparts.

Show headliner

Headlining the show is the WBO superbantam showdown between reigning champion Daniel Ponce De Leon of Mexico against undefeated challenger Rey "Boom Boom" Bautista, tagged by De la Hoya as "the next Manny Pacquiao."

Also in the card is the WBO superfly encounter between reigning champ Fernanco Montiel against the talented Z "The Dream" Gorres.

WBO bantam champ Jhonny Gonzales expressed apprehension about facing Gerry Peñalosa in the Philippines, so organizers are looking at WBO light-flyweight boss Hugo Cazares defending against either Bert Batawang or Rodel Mayol.

Alex John Banal, the undefeated prospect fighting out of the ALA Gym, will also take on Gerson Guerrero for the vacant WBO Intercontinental superfly throne.

'Very interesting'

Three other Filipino fighters belonging to Golden Boy Promotions are also slated to see action.

Asked about the major event in Cebu by Philboxing.com, Roach said: "I have two words for you: "Very interesting!"

In the same interview, Roach explained why he can't train De la Hoya for his May 5 slug-out with Floyd Mayweather Jr.

"There's no way I can train him," Roach said. "There's just no way for me to train him, like I have no time at all. It's impossible.

Roach said he would have to give up "almost everybody" if he agrees to train De La Hoya.

"I know I'm gonna be exclusive for him and I just can't do that," he said. "I'm a very loyal person, Manny inspires me a lot, and I love working with him. He brings life to my gym, and inspires everybody. Money can't make me leave Manny."

Pacquiao has been slated to fight a still unnamed foe in Macau April 28.

MAIL and More standouts Elmer Espiritu and Ronjay Buenafe battle for the rebound during a recent game. RYAN LIM

Mail & More seeks share of PBL lead

STANDINGS	W	L
Henkel Sista	6	2
Mail and More	5	2
Hapee-PCU	5	2
TeleTech	4	3
Toyota Otis	4	3
Harbour Centre	4	3
C. Lhuillier	3	5
Magnolia	2	6
Kettle Korn	0	7

GAMES TODAY (*Olivarez College Sports Center*)
2 p.m.—Mail and More vs Kettle Korn-UST
4 p.m.—Hapee-PCU vs Harbour Centre

THE LEAGUE NEWCOMER HAS OVERCOME initial doubts.

With the resumption of the PBL Silver Cup today, Mail and More will strut in confidently when it vies for a share of the lead against winless Kettle Korn-UST.

"I can say we're among the contenders now," says Comets coach Lawrence Chongson.

The Comets have reason to feel cocky when they shoot for their fifth straight win at 2 p.m. at the Olivarez College Sports Center in Parañaque.

While statistical frontrunner JR Quiñahan remains in full control, the Comets have also been drawing good performances from Elmer Espiritu, Mike Bravo and Jorel Cañizares.

Another victory will push the Comets to the top with Henkel Sista at 6-2.

Although Hapee-PCU is eyeing the same goal, the Teeth Masters should expect rough sailing against Harbour Centre at 4 p.m.

The Teeth Masters, bannered by Jason Castro, Mark Borboran and Larry Rodriguez, will try to halt their two-game skid to reclaim a piece of the lead.

But while Happe-PCU tries to arrest its slide, Harbour Centre appears to have overcome an erratic start.

The Port Masters ended 2006 with back-to-back victories to forge a tie with TeleTech and Toyota Otis at 4-3.

Reed Juntilla keyed the Port Masters' resurgence by averaging 21 points in their last two outings, and coach Jorge Gallent also expects JC Intal, a late acquisition, to bring in his explosive game soon.

"It was nice of him to tell his teammates to be patient with him," said Gallent of Intal, who has averaged 8.4 points in five games. "He's a complete player. He's a good passer and shooter. I want him to run a lot."

Intal was not yet around when Harbour Centre bowed to Hapee-PCU, 73-68, in their opening-day encounter.

Before the league took a two-week holiday break, Mail and More extended its winning streak to four following a 95-90 double overtime win versus Cebuana Lhuillier-Pera Padala.

Quiñahan topscored with 21 markers, while Espiritu and reserve Ronjay Buenafe made key plays in the clutch.

The Tigers, meanwhile, are hoping to put an end to their seven-game dry spell through Jojo Duncil, who's averaging a second-best 16.29 points in the league. *Jasmine W. Payo*

The bible blesses Pacquiao; the greatest turns 65

By Percy D. Della

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA—THE BIBLE bows to mere mortals.

It genuflects before demigods.

The Ring's double issue for March, now at news tands, features Filipino boxing deity Manny Pacquiao on the cover. And that's just for starters.

The publication's April special edition—extra, in newsroom parlance—will also have Manny on the cover when it hits the streets on Feb. 6.

Formerly called Ring Magazine, the publication has dubbed itself the bible of boxing and rightly so since Hall of Famer Nat Fleischer inaugurated it in 1922.

All through the years, it has unearthed boxing scandals, helped unheralded fighters hit pay dirt and become famous and covered the sport's mega events of all time.

Never mind the explosion of chatty boxing magazines and shallow websites. The Ring remains the gold standard for boxing news.

The extra will serve as the Ring's year-end awards issue. Its highlight:

Pacquiao's selection as the magazine's fighter of the year. It also marks the fourth time since 2004 that The Ring has featured the Pacman on its cover.

As the cover boy of the March issue, now on sale, Pacquiao is captured spearing with a left jab, a part of his arsenal that brought down his Mexican nemesis Erik Morales in the third round of their last encounter of a classic trilogy last Nov. 18.

The Filipino slugger's ferocious stance speaks volumes about his crowd-pleasing nature.

When it comes to ring action, he is no colossal bore like many boxing champions today.

COMMENTARY

In fact, two interesting articles in the March issue are on target about that.

"Best in the World?" writer William Detloff asked about Pacquiao on page 38.

"Too Much Pretty Boy and not Enough Gritty Boy?' author Eric Raskin wonders on page 30 about reigning welterweight king Floyd Mayweather.

Yes, Mayweather as in the guy due to face Oscar de la Hoya, alias Golden Boy, Pacquiao's botched promoter in May in what is predicted as boxing' biggest pay-per-view encounter.

Ho-hum.

* * *

Seems like only yesterday when the Louisville Lip entered the boxing scene and changed it forever. But come Jan. 17, Muhammad Ali turns 65.

Wrote A.J. Liebling about Ali's entry into the sport: "Just when the sweet science appears to lie like a painted ship upon a painted ocean," a new Hero . . . comes along like a Moran tug to pull it out of the ocean."

In the run-up to Ali's birthday, the media have started to celebrate the great heavyweight's mind and muscle.

The media are beginning to tap a slew of celebrities, athletes and human rights activists in revisiting the former champion's phrases, poems and witticisms. Remember "floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee?"

The sports shows on television have dusted off their canned documentaries or produced new ones about the guy. One such production, "Ali's Dozen" was shown on ESPN last night and would be queued to run again before Jan. 17.

"Ali's Dozen" looks back at the 12 greatest fights fought by the sports giant. It includes the legendary "Thrilla in Manila" with Joe Frazier and "Rumble in the Jungle" and the famous rope-a-dope triumph over George Foreman.

SPORTSWATCH

PCAP derby on tap at Makati Coliseum

THE FIRTST BIG COCKFIGHTING EVENT FOR 2007 BEGINS AT THE MAKATI Coliseum today with the Pinoy Cockers Association of the Philippines (PCAP) 5-cock derby featuring some 80 quality fights backed up by sponsors B-Meg Derby Ace and Gran Matador. Aside from guest participants, PCAP members will field an entry. A total of 13 derbies will be presented by PCAP, all of them 5-cock events, on Jan. 6 and 15; Feb. 19 and 26; March 10 and 26; April 16 and 30; May 7 and 21; June 4 and 18 and finals on July 7. The first Makati 8-Cock International Derby blasts off on Feb. 5 with P3 million at stake.

Fastest-win event gets going at LPC

EIGHTY FIGHTS ARE ON TAP IN THE CROWD-DRAWING "FASTEST WIN One-Cock Timbangan" of Las Pinas Coliseum which starts at 12 noon today. Participants may register from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. Hosts Russel Pilapil and Lito Natanuan has put up a total guaranteed prize of P300,000. A jackpot prize of P25,000 awaits the fastest win champion who will be declared after every 10 fights. The overall fastest win champion gets P30,000 with the slowest champion taking home P10,000. For inquiries, call 873-1040 or 874-3910.

Roligon 5-cocker finals today

THE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND OF THE "NOCHE BUENA" 5-COCK DERBY takes centerstage at Roligon Mega Cockpit at 2 p.m. today with more than 120 fights sponsored by Lakpue Drug Inc. and Thunderbird Enertone. After two days of battle, 30 participants qualified with two wins each, including Arnold Gregorio, Garry Santos, Serge Katigbak, Pol Derpo, Rolly Onofre, Zaldy Alonsabe, JR Lagunday, Aries Jabro, Jay- Ar Pachoco, Ronnel Tanada, Zaldy Valle, Ricky Tan and Mon Arcenas. Twenty-five new participants will field straight five cocks today, among them Jun Topacio, Bobby Doromal, Rep. Conrad Estrellado, Arsenio Armada, Joel Regori, Dan and Art Lacsina, Boy Tuazon and Rey Briones.

FEU spikers on course for title repeat

FAR EASTERN UNIVERSITY IS ON track to retain the men's crown as matches ushering the second round of the UAAP volleyball competition resume on Jan. 14 at the UP gym in Diliman, Quezon City.

Ateneo goes up against National U at 8 a.m., Adamson clashes with UST at 9 a.m. and University of the East battles tournament host University of the Philippines at 10 a.m.

The Tamaraws lead the men's race with a 6-0 win-loss record followed by the Maroons at 5-1.

The Maroons' only loss came at the hands of the defending champions, 24-26, 25-15, 25-23, 25-16, at the start of the event Dec. 3.

The Tigers are running third at 4-2, their two losses coming against FEU (25-22, 18-25, 27-25, 22-25) and UP (28-26), 21-25, 25-20, 9-25, 16-14).

Santo Tomas paces the women's section with six straight wins followed by FEU (5-1) and defending champion Adamson (4-2).

The Lady Falcons fell to the Tigresses, 21-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-19, and to the Lady Tams, 22-25, 26-24, 25-13, 25-20.

Women's volleyball resumes also on Jan. 14 at the Blue Eagle gym in Katipunan with NU facing FEU at 2 p.m., UP meeting Adamson at 3 p.m. and Ateneo tackling UE at 4.

IBF willing to sanction Pacquiao-Klassen

From / A21

Ledwada.

However, Tucker said Klassen has been ordered to fight top-ranked Mzonke Fana next, although he brought up the possibility of facing Pacquiao instead.

"There is always a chance that Klassen could ask for an exception," Tucker explained on how to go about a possible clash between Pacquiao and Klassen.

Fana is the same fighter who had been manhandled by Mexican icon Marco Antonio Barrera in two rounds in 2005.

Klassen, according to Pacquiao, is one of the names being floated as his next foe, along with such little-known fighters as Guadalupe Rosales, Agnaldo Nunes, Nobuhiro Honmo, Francisco Lorenzo and Yusuke Kobori.

PSC taps private sector for Olympics

By June Navarro

FACING AN ACUTE NEED, THE PHILIPpine Sports Commission will lay down the groundwork to entice private sponsors for the country's gold-medal quest in the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

PSC chair William "Butch" Ramirez is optimistic Team Philippines could lure the private sector to support the ambitious project.

The main man in this project is, again, First Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo.

"With the First Gentleman leading the way to raise the funds, businessmen will definitely support it (the project)," said Ramirez.

Arroyo has promised to bankroll the overseas training of at least 30 athletes from different national sports associations who have been identified as potential medal winners for the Beijing Olympiad next year.

RAMIREZ

But the PSC, joining hands with the Philippine Olympic Committee in the quest to win the first-ever gold in the Olympics, insisted that the private sector should play a pivotal role to achieve the objective.

Billionaires Lucio Tan, Henry Sy Jr. and Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala are included on the PSC's list of probable supporters. They rank among the world's richest businessmen, according to Forbes magazine of 2006.

"If we in the PSC and the POC have proved that we can work together and present a clear blueprint of where the money will go, I don't think these billionaires will hesitate," said Ramirez.

"I believe that every corporate office has a responsibility to the country."

Tan, who owns Tanduay Holdings, Fortune Tobacco and Asia Brewery, is the Philippines' wealthiest and ranks 451st among the world's 793 billionaires, according to Forbes.

"It's important for the POC and the PSC to sustain the unity for the Olympics," said Ramirez, who added San Miguel Corp. big boss Danding Cojuangco and PLDT top honcho Manny V. Pangilinan, who are both known sports patrons, to the list of possible supporters.

"I'm sure these people will help us.

"It's just a matter of putting the plan together early. We came up late with the proposals before, so we're beginning to fix them as early as possible."

With the support of Arroyo, Team Philippines got the needed funding from the private sector during the Philippines' hosting of the 23rd Southeast Asian Games in 2005.

Arroyo shied away from the Asian Games, and the RP contingent was forced to rely solely on the P30 million budget allocated for its stint in Doha, Qatar.

Vijay soars to a share of the lead in Hawaii

KAPALUA, HAWAII—EVERY PLAYER WALKED off the 18th green Thursday and deposited an autographed golf ball into the new FedExCup trophy that will be awarded at the end of the season.

Vijay Singh wants the trophy they hand out Sunday in the Mercedes-Benz Championship.

Convinced that he has figured out his flaws, determined not to let another opportunity on Maui slip away, Singh survived the raging trade wind at Kapalua to make six birdies for a 4-under 69, leaving him in a five-way tie for the lead as the PGA Tour season began in strenuous conditions.

"There's so much going on about FedExCup, I'm tired of listening to it," Singh said. "Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be a good year. There's still tournaments out there that we have to focus on, and not focus on the FedExCup itself. Right now, my focus is going to be on winning golf tournaments."

This one might require some patience.

The wind was so strong that Stephen Ames had 152 yards to the hole at No. 13 and ripped a 5-iron. He called it the toughest wind since Saturday at Muirfield in the 2002 British Open, the day Tiger Woods' hope for a Grand Slam ended with an 81.

The result was a crowd atop the leaderboard.

K.J. Choi struck the first shot of the season and was the first to post a 69 with a nice chip to tap-in range on the par-5 18th. Will MacKenzie, one of 13 newcomers to the Mercedes-Benz Championship, and Brett Wetterich and Ames eventually joined the lead.

Love was poised to join them until he hit a slight fade that the wind turned into a wild slice, the ball disappearing into the weeds on the 16th hole, forcing him to hit another. He escaped with a bogey, then finished with a two-putt birdie on the 18th after hitting 4-iron from 275 yards away with the wind at his back. He was one shot back at 70.

"I'm glad to get in under par," Davis Love III said. "I don't think if we were on vacation we would have played today."

This is the first of 40 events to earn points in a season-long competition that will end at the Tour Championship, with $10 million going to winner of the FedExCup.

Stuart Appleby got off to a sluggish start in his bid to tie a PGA Tour record with his fourth straight victory at the same tournament. He had one birdie, one bogey and closed with 10 straight pars for an even-par 73.

Only a dozen players managed to break par.

In winning at Kapalua the last three years, Appleby has been a combined four shots better than Singh, who has not finished out of the top 10 in his last seven starts at the Mercedes-Benz Championship.

"Golf doesn't owe you anything," Singh said about his close calls in this event. "If you start feeling that way, then you've got a problem. I've had great finishes over here. You can look at it that way. I'm looking forward to the next three days and see what happens."

Singh has slipped to No. 7 in the world after winning only one tournament in his last 35 starts on the PGA Tour. He figured out what was wrong with his swing late last year, spent the offseason fixing it, and is ready to get his game going in the right direction again. *AP*

HENRY DAGMIL'S American coach believes the 25-year-old can easily qualify for the long jump finals in the Beijing Olympics. LYN RILLON

Ace jumper sets sights on Olympic medal

by June Navarro

AFTER FINISHING OUT OF the medal in the Asiad, RP long-jump ace Henry Dagmil must've felt his only stab at glory slip away.

But don't tell that to sports officials who saw a potential winner when Dagmil finished fifth in the recent Asian Games.

These officials felt it could only be the beginning.

In fact, Dagmil is a cinch to become the beneficiary of a program designed to identify the best RP athletes capable of capturing a medal in the Olympics.

"I'm excited to go back to training. There's still so much to be learned, especially now that we're targeting the Olympics," said the 25-year-old Army man from South Cotabato.

Bold vow

Dagmil's American coach, Chris Huffins, has boldly vowed to make the country's long-jump ace a qualifier in the finals of the event in the 2008 Beijing Olympiad.

"If you send him back to me, I promise you he'll qualify in the finals of the Olympics," Philippine Olympic Committee president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco quoted Huffins as saying.

"With a statement like that, I think we can't go wrong by sending Dagmil back there," Cojuangco explained. "It means to say that there's a potential gold medal winner there."

Fifth place

Dagmil trained under Huffins, decathlon bronze medalist in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, at the University of California-Berkeley in the United States for two months before coming off with an impressive fifth-place finish in the Doha Asiad.

"I'm not an expert in this matter but my appraisal of his performance is that he lacked competition experience," said Cojuangco.

Authoritative jump

"The way he jumped in the Asian Games, he jumped with authority. Based on what I saw, it's obvious he could improve some more," he added.

Dagmil will join 29 other athletes identified by the POC and the Philippine Sports Commission as potential medal winners in the Olympics.

To be bankrolled by First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, these select athletes will be sent abroad to train as early as March and stay there until the Beijing sports conclave on Aug. 8, 2008.

The only break for these "super athletes" will be the Southeast Asian Games this year in Thailand and a couple of international tournaments lined up for them in the run-up to the Olympics.

Qualifying leap

For now, Dagmil has set his eyes on breaching the qualifying leap of 8.05 meters for the Olympics.

"I want to meet the standard qualifying record and get a crack in the Olympics," said Dagmil, who will see action in the Asian Indoor championship in Thailand next month and the Taiwan Open in May.

Dagmil's best leap during the Asian Games was 7.65 meters.

SEAG record holder

Dagmil has already represented the country in several Southeast Asian Games, including the last one which the country hosted in December 2005, where he also won the gold medal in record-breaking fashion.

Dagmil leapt to 7.81 meters in the SEA Games, breaking the record for the regional meet.

Television fitness guru helps Toney get leaner

HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA—JAMES TONEY removed his nylon running suit, walked by the row of cameras and strode confidently to the scale.

"234," fight promoter Don King yelled out.

And that represented the first of what Toney hopes is a pair of victories this weekend.

When Toney lost a split decision to Nigeria's Samuel Peter in September, his camp said he was four kilos (nine pounds) heavier, considerably flabbier. and hardly in the shape befitting a heavyweight contender.

But after enlisting the help of fitness guru Billy Blanks, Toney believes he's more than ready for Saturday night's rematch against Peter.

"I'm in 150 percent better shape now," said Toney, who actually was listed at 105.5 kilos (233 pounds) for the first fight. "And I will show everyone that on Saturday night."

Peter (27-1, 22 knockouts) lost some weight for the rematch; he was 116.5 kilos (257 pounds) when he got the controversial win over Toney (69-5, with three draws and 43 KOs), and weighed in Thursday afternoon at 113 kilos (249 pounds).

"Doesn't matter if he's working with that trainer and his shake-booty," Peter said. "I train with a real trainer."

The winner of this elimination fight gets a mandatory shot at the WBC title against champion Oleg Maskaev, who claimed that belt with a surprising knockout of Hasim Rahman in August and defended it last month with a unanimous decision over Peter Okhello.

"I don't think the Russian will be able to beat either one of these guys," said King, even though Maskaev—who was born in Kazakhstan—is an American who only recently received dual citizenship from Russia.

After the first fight, Toney's camp got an offer of help from Blanks, a former martial arts and US amateur boxing champion who's become a fitness icon selling his "Tae Bo" regimen videos.

Blanks completely changed Toney's workout and eating habits, putting him on a 1,500-calorie diet and hiring someone to prepare him five small meals a day.

"I would challenge any boxer to come do what James Toney has done to prepare for this fight," Blanks said.

Naturally, the Peter camp wasn't impressed with Blanks' assessment and expressed those sentiments loudly during the pre-fight news conference.

"I watched a lot of films on Billy. I watched Billy work on television with those pink gloves on and kicking his legs all up in the air and throwing legs over here and legs over there," said Stacy McKinley, one of Peter's trainers. "I admire your work, but this isn't boxaerobics." *AP*

HITCH-FREE MATCH: Martina Hingis prepares for a serve from her opponent, Italian Tathiana Garbin, during the Mondial Australian Women's Hardcourts tennis semifinals. Garbin withdrew from the match due to injury, leaving Hingis to advance to the final. AFP

NCA World Championship up Jan. 9

A STAR-STUDDED ROSTER WILL BE present when the National Cockers Association (NCA) opens the World Championship Derby at the Pasay City Cockpit on Jan. 9.

"The NCA World Championship Derby showcases the best of the cockfighting industries of the United States and of the Philippines," derby specialist Patrick Antonio said.

American cockers Larry Whitehead, Joe Wolcott, Tom Cooper, Eddie Odell, Jeff Hudspetch, Gene Batia, Jimbo Cox, Damon Yorkman, Andy Robertson, Red Lawson, Rey Morrison, Richard Borris, Chuck Halbert, Richard Lanier, Paul Pasot, Jason Campbell, Bryan Cochran, Joe Sanford, Crow Grave, Larry Barletta, and Fil-Ams Rene Medina and Ric de Guzman are joining the derby.

Wolcott recently won the Sunset Recreation Club Derby in Louisiana, USA, with a score of 7-1.

They will do battle with local cockfighting bigwigs such as Ramon Revilla, Rep. Iggy Arroyo, Manolo Lopez, Gov. Ito Ynares, Secretary Ronnie Puno, Jun Santiago, Edwin Abella, Boy Jiao, Chair Rudy Albano, Danding Cojuangco, Fiscal Villanueva, brothers Eddie and Boboy Araneta, brothers Raffy and Mauro Prieto, JV Magsaysay, Baby Asistio, Johnny Jalandoni, Charing Magbuhos, Larry Mendoza, Joey Sarasola, Jun Marasigan, Beboy Uy, Edwin Javelosa, Randy Peralta, Jerry Barias, Tony Marfori, Johnny Lagbas, William Go, James Uy and Essie Mallillin.

People's champion Manny Pacquiao is also a contender for the NCA crown.

Also fielding entries are Pico Berin, Efren Canlas, Mario Villamor, Jun and Rudy Jingco, Jet Fernando, Madlangbayan Brothers, Art Sevilla, Edwin Santos, Bebot Villar, Tony Lasalla, Benjie Lim, Paul Estrellado, Michael Co, Lando Celebre, Edgar Santos, Rey Briones, Boyet Joson, Ellan Nagano, Ricky Valencia, Jerry Ramos and Tony Open.

Other derby enthusiasts joining are Eric dela Rosa, Louie Cua, Boy Royo, Nestor Mercado, Lito Orillaza, Rudy Salud, Manny and Arman Santos, Pepito Ngo, Tony Tan, Boy Marzo, Jing Paras, Butch Pichay, William Co, Alex Escalona, Boy Torres, Connie Dy, Ruel Ricafort, Danny Valero, Miranda, Tommy Cooper, Claudy Bautista, Raymond Velayo, Amboy Manlapaz, Richard Bates and Bong Piñeda.

Pistons take sting out of ailing Hornets

DALLAS Mavericks guard Jason Terry (right) tries to get a shot over Indiana Pacers forward Jermaine O'Neal. AP

OKLAHOMA CITY—RICHARD HAMILTON SCORED 27 points and the Detroit Pistons hardly missed Chauncey Billups, rolling to a 92-68 victory over the New Orleans Hornets on Thursday night.

The Pistons snapped a three-game losing streak as the Hornets were unable to climb out of a 26-point halftime hole without starters Chris Paul (sprained right ankle), Peja Stojakovic (back surgery) and David West (right elbow surgery).

Jannero Pargo led the Hornets with 16 points, Desmond Mason added 15 and reserve Devin Brown scored 14. Tyson Chandler grabbed 16 rebounds for New Orleans, which lost for the 10th time in its last 12 games.

The Hornets, who rank last in the NBA in scoring, had their lowest output of the season.

Mavericks 100, Pacers 91

At Dallas, Devin Harris scored 13 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter, pushing Dallas past Indiana and extending the NBA's longest winning streak to 12 games.

It is the second 12-game winning streak this season for the Mavericks (26-7), who have the NBA's best record. The first dozen victories in a row came after the defending Western Conference champions started the season 0-4 for the first time in team history.

Josh Howard, who has won back-to-back NBA player of the week awards, had 25 points and 11 rebounds to lead the Mavericks. Dirk Nowitzki, still bothered by sinus problems that forced him to miss a game Saturday, still had 20 points in 36 minutes.

Al Harrington had 24 points and 11 rebounds for Indiana, which played its first game in 2007 after being off since a home loss to Charlotte on Saturday night. Jermaine O'Neal had 20 points and a season-high 16 rebounds, while Jeff Foster had 10 points and 12 rebounds.

Lakers 132, Kings 128, OT

At Sacramento, California, Kobe Bryant overcame a scoreless opening 16 minutes to finish with 42 points, and Los Angeles blew a 21-point lead before rallying past Sacramento.

Bryant fed Smush Parker for the game-tying shot in the final second of regulation for one of his nine assists, then scored on the opening possession of overtime to give the Lakers the lead for good in the first meeting of the season between these two fierce California rivals.

Brian Cook added 26 points, Luke Walton scored 16 and Andrew Bynum had 15 points and 11 rebounds as the Lakers won their first game since center Kwame Brown went down with an ankle injury.

Sacramento was also without its starting center, as Brad Miller missed the game with flu-like symptoms. Mike Bibby led the Kings with 38 points, Kevin Martin had 21 and Ron Artest added 19. *AP*

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Bogut blooming with 'bullseye' gone

WASHINGTON—AUSTRALIAN-BORN CENTER Andrew Bogut, the number one overall pick in the 2005 NBA Draft, is making even more of an impact this season after helping the Milwaukee Bucks to the playoffs in his rookie season.

"In the last 21 years, there have been only four number one picks to make the playoffs in their rookie season: David Robinson, Chris Webber, Tim Duncan and Andrew Bogut. That's pretty good company," said coach Terry Stotts.

Bogut's scoring, rebounding and assists are all up this year. So are his minutes played, shooting percentage, and free throw accuracy.

"Last year I was worried about getting the ball, worried about all that type of stuff," Bogut told Reuters in a locker room interview. "This year I'm just going out there and playing.

"The difference between this year and last has been night and day since I've learned how to be a professional."

Bogut, 22, is averaging 11.7 points, 8.2 rebounds and 3.2 assists a game this season. While those are solid numbers, many believe the number one collegiate pick should exhibit All-Star credentials right out of the gate.

Stotts believes the burden associated with being the top draft choice is exaggerated.

"The expectations of a number one pick, especially since they've become younger and younger, it's a little but unfair," he said. "Andrew had a very solid rookie season and he helped us make the playoffs.

"He's gotten better this year. He has more responsibility and statistically he's improved. His interior play is one of the reasons why we had a really good December. He's a very competitive player."

Bogut claims he no longer feels he has a bull's eye on his back following his selection out of Utah as the top pick in the draft.

"For me, it's gone," said Bogut, who left Utah after his sophomore season after earning consensus Player of the Year honours. "I had a hell of a year in college and got a lot of awards. I think I deserved to be that pick.

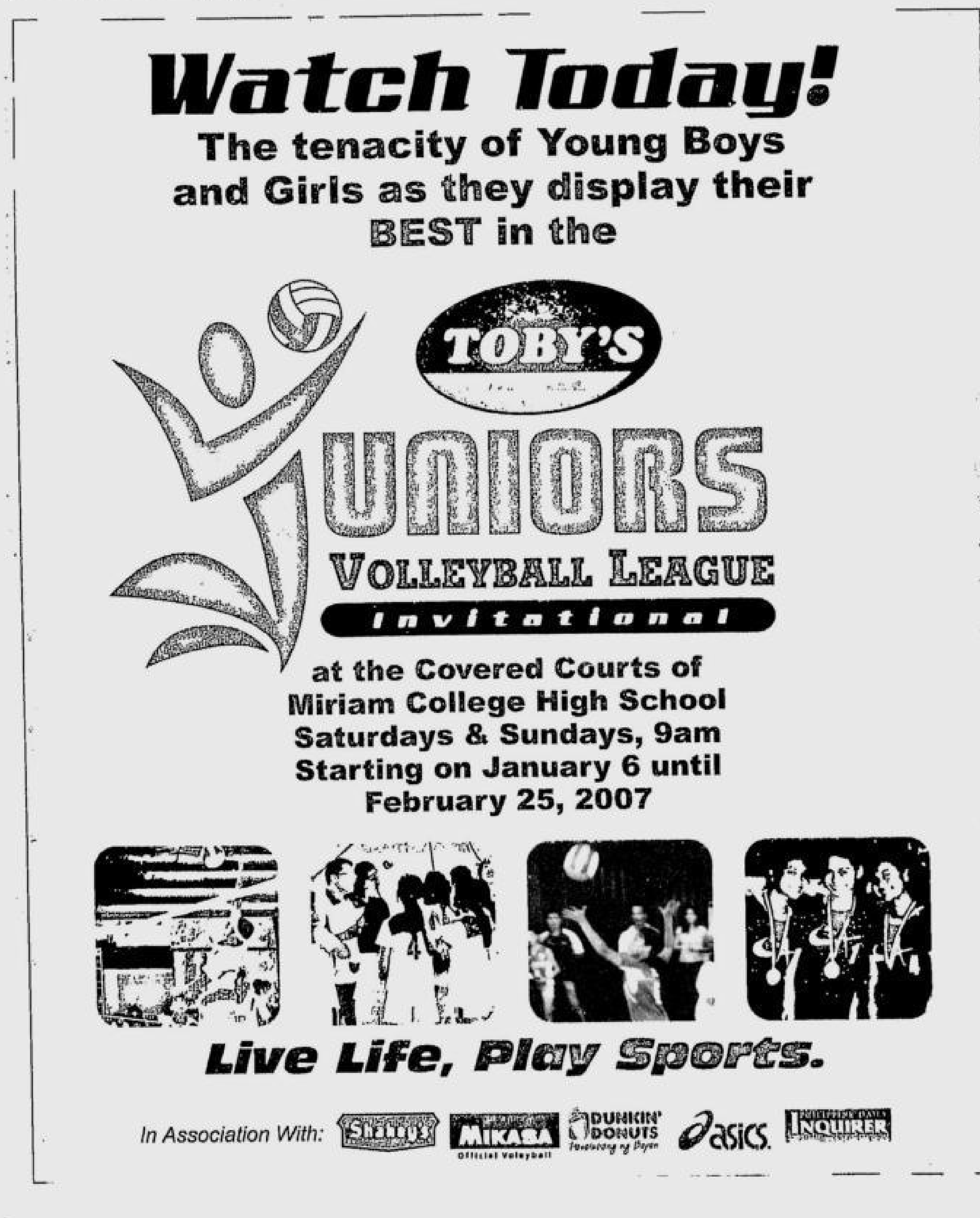
"People are always going to pick at you, no matter how good you are, no matter how bad you are. I've done better than several other top picks in the last five or six years. So I'm not too worried about that anymore."

Bogut, sixth in the league in shooting percentage at .568, does the little things that help a team win. He is an excellent passer and runs the floor well for a big man. It is not unusual for him to lead the Bucks in assists.

But Bogut, who featured for Australia at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, is not concerned about his statistics.

The Bucks (16-16) were ousted in the first round of the playoffs last year by Detroit, an experience that only whetted his appetite.

"Just getting to the playoffs last year and getting a taste of it was unbelievable," he said. "Getting to the second round is my next goal. That's what I really want." *Reuters*



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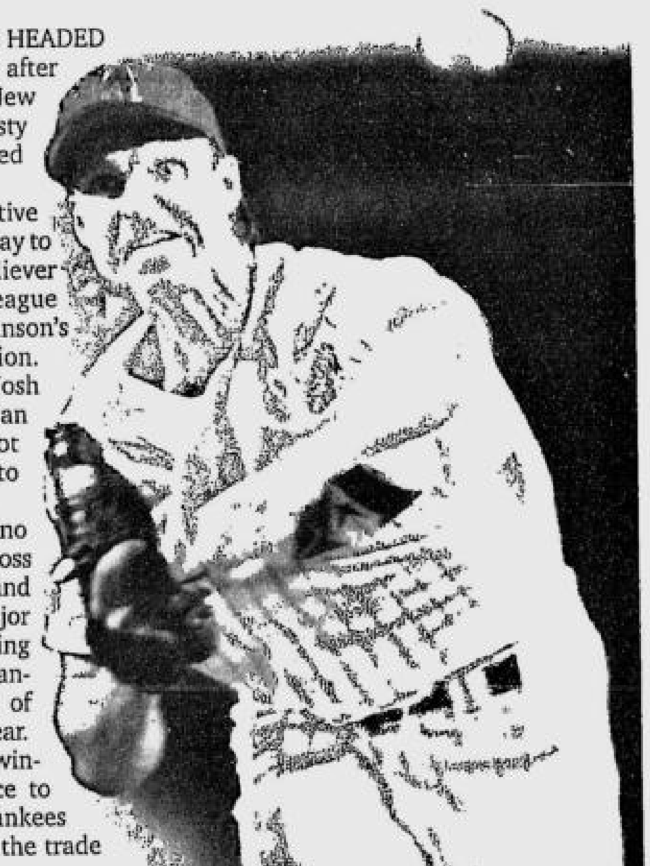
NY Yankees ready to send Johnson back to Arizona



JOHNSON: Back with Diamondbacks AP

NEW YORK—RANDY JOHNSON IS HEADED back to the Arizona Diamondbacks after two unfulfilling years with the New York Yankees that began with a nasty sidewalk confrontation and ended with a messy playoff loss.

The Yankees reached a tentative agreement with Arizona on Thursday to trade Johnson to Arizona for reliever Luis Vizcaino and three minor league players, a move that allows Johnson's agents to get him a contract extension.

Arizona general manager Josh Byrnes confirmed what he called "an agreement in principle" but did not identify the players that would go to the Yankees.

New York would receive Vizcaino and minor league right-handers Ross Ohlendorf and Steven Jackson, and shortstop Alberto Gonzalez, a Major League Baseball official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The Yankees also would pay $2 million of Johnson's $16 million salary this year.

Teams are granted a 72-hour window by the commissioner's office to close tentative deals, and the Yankees and Diamondbacks must finalize the trade by 5 p.m. New York time Sunday.

Johnson, a five-time Cy Young Award winner, never seemed to fit in during two seasons with the Yankees, starting with when he put his long right arm up to block a television camera and said "Get out of my face, that's all I ask" as he walked from his midtown Manhattan hotel to his physical.

He was jovial during spring training but often turned taciturn when games that counted began.

He went 34-19 during the regular season with New York, pitching much of the time with back pain that caused him to have surgery in October. But unforgiving fans focused on his 0-1 record with a 6.92 ERA in three postseason appearances for a franchise that expects to win every World Series.

Last year, he lasted just 5 2/3 innings and gave up five runs in Game 3 of New York's first-round series against Detroit. The Yankees lost 6-0, fell behind 2-1 in the best-of-five series and were eliminated the following day, sparking days of speculation that manager Joe Torre would be fired. *AP*

IN THIS ISSUE

- **'06 deficit seen** to settle at P81B /B2
- **PLDT, Globe launch** plans for OFWs /B6

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Forex reserves hit all-time high of $23B

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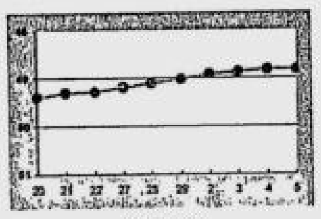


JANUARY

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

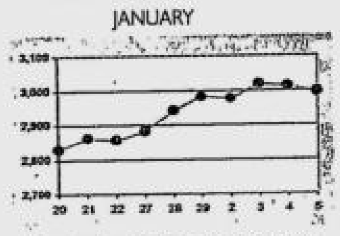
P48.84 = $1

As of 5 p.m., Jan. 5, 2006

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

JANUARY



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Shares close lower

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 0.54-percent lower yesterday as the market consolidated after hitting near 10-year highs earlier in the week, dealers said. The composite index was down 16.35

SHARES/ B2

Big boost from OFW inflows, investments in local stocks

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINES' FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES SURGED TO an all-time high of $23 billion in end-2006 even as the public sector took advantage of robust dollar inflows from overseas Filipino workers and offshore investors to retire foreign debts ahead of maturity during the year.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. announced yesterday that the the gross international reserves (GIR), a key indicator of the country's ability to service the foreign exchange requirements of the economy, rose by $4.5 billion or 24 percent from $18.49 billion in end-2005.

The GIR consists of the BSP's gross foreign currency holdings, gold reserves, foreign investments and special drawing rights from the International Monetary Fund.

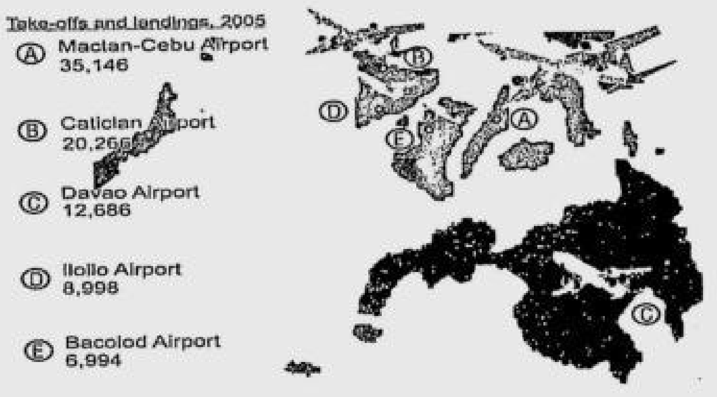
FOREX/ B2

INQUIRER MONITOR

Figures that matter in our nation's life

Mactan airport busiest outside NCR (2005)

The Mactan-Cebu International Airport remained the busiest airport outside of Metro Manila in terms of aircraft movement in 2005 with over 35,000 aircraft take-offs and landings.


Take-offs and landings, 2005
Ⓐ Mactan-Cebu Airport 35,146
Ⓑ Caticlan Airport 20,266
Ⓒ Davao Airport 12,686
Ⓓ Iloilo Airport 8,998
Ⓔ Bacolod Airport 6,994
Ⓐ
Ⓑ
Ⓒ
Ⓓ
Ⓔ

Source: National Statistical Coordination Board
Kate Pedroso Inquirer Research

December inflation lowest in 3 years at 4.3%

By Michelle V. Remo

CONSUMER PRICES ROSE BY 4.3 PERcent in December last year, the slowest in almost three years, as the peso continued to strengthen and prices of oil in the world market eased.

In December 2005, the inflation rate stood at 6.7 percent. The last time inflation rate hit a low of 4.3 percent was in April 2004.

The inflation rate in December was within the forecast made by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas at 4.2-4.8 percent and was slower than the 4.7 percent recorded in November.

Excluding volatile prices of selected food and energy items, core inflation in December settled at 4.6 percent, a slowdown from the 4.7 percent the previous month.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO), slower price increases were recorded for commodities under the food, beverage and tobacco at 4.7 percent from 4.9 percent the previous month. Fuel, light and water also recorded a decelerated price increase at 5.4 percent from 7.7 percent.

On the other hand, clothing posted a faster increase in prices to 3 percent from 2.9 percent in November. Inflation for housing and repairs, services and miscellaneous remained at the November levels of 3.7, 4.4 and 2.5 percent, respectively.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. told reporters that the movement of prices in December indicated that the inflation rate for 2007 would stay within the government's target of between 4 and 5 percent.

"The lower rate for December bodes well for a within-target inflation rate for 2007, barring any adverse shocks. It

DECEMBER/ B2

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'06 deficit seen to settle at ₱81B

Gov't expects to post 4th straight year of decline

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT'S budget deficit for 2006 likely settled at P81 billion—better than the projected P125 billion that was set under the fiscal program for last year.

The deficit forecast takes into account the estimated P970.4 billion in revenue collection, and the P1.051 trillion in expenditures.

According to the Department of Finance's latest estimates, the projected deficit is at the lower end of the forecast range of P80 billion and P90 billion.

An P81-billion deficit will be equivalent to only 1.34 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The ceiling set under the government's fiscal program for 2006 was 2.1 percent.

Should the forecast be accurate, then the government would be posting a budget deficit in its fourth straight year of decline.

After the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the government stopped posting surpluses and began to incur deficit in its budget.

In 1998, the deficit hit P49.9 billion. It peaked at P210.7 billion in 2002.

With the threat of a fiscal crisis hanging over its head, the government began to implement reforms, including tax hikes, to reduce its deficit.

The deficit was cut to P199.9 billion in 2003, to P187.1 billion in 2004, and to P146.8 billion in 2005.

The expected lower-than-programmed deficit for 2006 came about despite the Bureau of Internal Revenue's tax collection shortfall.

Last year's fiscal performance was partly due to improved collection of duties by the Bureau of Customs, and revenues generated through the privatization of government assets, as well as tighter spending.

Congress in 2006 failed to pass the proposed P1.053-trillion national budget for the year. The government was then forced to operate on the 2005 budget, which was about P100 billion lower than the proposed budget.

The Bureau of Customs, which collects duties from imported goods, yesterday reported that it had exceeded its P197-billion target for 2006. The BOC said preliminary figures showed that its 2006 collections had hit P198.105 billion.

On the other hand, the BIR collected less than its P675.4-billion tax target set by the national government. The BIR reported that in 2006, it collected P644.4 billion in taxes.

RP workers to benefit from BPO windfall

By Riza T. Olchondra

Asia Netcom, a data communications provider that operates an undersea cable system in Asia, has identified the Philippines as a key country from where to recruit technical experts and engineers.

According to Asia Netcom, it is anticipating a "significant growth" from supplying the needs of the Philippine business process outsourcing (BPO) industry.

The industry is expected to generate $12 billion in revenues and one million jobs by 2010.

Dr. Paul Crosio, Asia Netcom senior vice-president and head of human resources, said that the company is set to grow its employee base by nearly 20 percent. It also intends to recruit aggressively across the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the Philippines, to support this expansion.

Crosio said that with the anticipated growth, Asia Netcom will need more engineers and product developers.

About 10 to 20 engineers will be hired this year and many more will be recruited over the following years as Asia Netcom grows in the Philippines. More posts are also expected to open as existing Filipino personnel are promoted of transferred to overseas posts.

"Our business has experienced robust growth in the last four quarters," Asia Netcom's country manager Agnes Gervacio said in a statement. "In anticipation of new successes, we are recruiting people into mission-critical technical support positions both here in the Philippines and across the region. The Philippines boasts an abundance of technical and engineering excellence, and we are eager to hire the best talents."

According to the Commission on Higher Education, there are 30,000 registered electronics and communications engineers in the country.

Tiu group paid ₱503.8M for BPI's Far East unit

THE TIU GROUP OF PROPERTY developers has paid P503.8 million for its purchase of Far East Savings Bank from the Ayala group's Bank of the Philippine Islands.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday, BPI vice president Cecilia Tanchoco said the bank had executed and signed the agreement to sell 50 million shares in Far East Savings with the Tiu-led JTKC Equities Inc., Surewell Equities Inc. and Star Equities Inc.

Tanchoco said the transaction was fully settled in cash, following receipt of approval from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

The buyout marked a return for the Tiu group to the banking sector. Last year, the group sold its interests in International Exchange Bank.

The former Far East Savings Bank will be renamed "Sterling Bank of Asia Inc."

Far East Savings is a thrift bank with one head office branch. But the new owners are requesting the BSP's permission to buy 14 thrift branches from BPI Family Bank.

The Tiu group develops, manages and operates upscale serviced apartments like the MansionGroup and Discovery Suites.

Aside from real estate, it has interests in finance and manufacturing of construction materials and industrial chemicals.

Based on the P13.5-billion valuation of Union Bank of the Philippines' purchase of iBank last year, JTKC received over P3 billion from the unloading of its 24.58 percent stake, which it could now plow back into banking, analysts said.

Far East Savings Bank was one of the subsidiaries BPI acquired when it bought out the assets of Far East Bank and Trust Co. in 2000.

BPI, the country's third largest banking group, has decided to sell the unit since it already has subsidiaries involved in similar businesses.

Its operating subsidiaries include BPI Family Savings Bank, BPI Direct Savings Bank (for overseas Filipino workers), BPI Leasing Corp. and BPI International Finance Ltd. Hong Kong. *Doris C. Dumlao*

In 2007, more flexible monetary policy seen

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG PILIPINAS expects monetary management to be more flexible this year due to the slowdown of inflation in 2006, which averaged 6.2 percent from 7.7 percent the previous year.

The BSP last November kept its overnight policy rates, but virtually eased monetary policy when it put in place a tiering system—a scheme where it pays a lower rate for overnight money placed in excess of certain levels to encourage banks to lend out instead of park all their funds with the monetary authority.

This year, analysts expect the BSP to cut its overnight rates—currently at 7.5 percent for the overnight borrowing, and 9.75 percent for the overnight lending—by at least 50 basis points and eventually scrap the tiering system.

BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. yesterday said the December year-on-year inflation of 4.3 percent—the lowest in two years—fell within the institution's forecast range of 4.2-4.8 percent for the month.

"The lower rate for December bodes well for a within-target inflation rate for 2007, barring any adverse shocks," Tetangco said.

The BSP says inflation may ease back to the targeted path of 4-5 percent this year.

Tetangco said the strengthening of the peso also contributed to the deceleration in headline inflation.

He explained that the steady decline in inflation in 2006 was due to the easing oil prices, a stronger peso and generally stable food prices.

"Latest forecasts also indicate that average inflation in 2008 is likely to be in line with the 4 percent plus or minus 1 percentage point target," Tetangco said.

Alliance Global raises capital to ₱13B

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

ALLIANCE GLOBAL GROUP INC. (AGGI), the holding firm that owns a sizeable block in the local McDonald's franchise, has won shareholder approval to increase its capital to P13 billion, from P5 billion, for the company to expand into the food manufacturing business this year.

According to Andrew Tan, AGGI chair, the increased capital will largely be used to acquire local food manufacturing interests.

The actual budget for the acquisitions has not yet been disclosed. But Tan said AGGI could use a combination of debt and equity to fund future deals.

"We are looking at a rapid way of growing our business this year," Tan said yesterday. "The increase in the authorized capital stock will enable us to pursue an aggressive expansion program. Discussions have been started with various parties and the necessary disclosures will follow when everything has been finalized."

Tan also said that AGGI has substantially increased its capital expenditure this year to P5 billion from P1 to P1.5 billion last year, largely for acquisitions and for the expansion of its existing businesses in glass manufacturing.

On the capital increase, AGGI earlier approved a P3-billion stock rights offering which consists of 2.2 billion common shares at P1.50 a share. The 1-for-1 stock rights offer may be issued by the first quarter of next year, sources said.

AGGI said the rights shares would be issued from the 7.95 billion proposed shares increase in its authorized capital.

Last year, AGGI acquired 49 percent in the Philippine franchise of McDonald's, making it 100-percent Filipino-owned. AGGI acquired the stake for $15.05 million.

December inflation ...

From page B1

also affords the BSP greater latitude in the conduct of monetary policy," Tetangco said.

The peso closed at 49.03 against the dollar last December, stronger than the 53.09 the previous year. An appreciation of the peso helps slow down inflation because it makes the cost of imported goods cheaper.

The BSP attributed the strengthening of the peso to increased dollar inflows mainly from remittances of overseas Filipino workers.

Similarly, easing prices of oil in the world market tempers inflation since about 90 percent of the country's oil requirements are imported.

The Department of Energy said Dubai crude, the benchmark used in setting domestic oil prices, averaged at $58.685 a barrel last month, down substantially from the record highs of close to $70 in August.

The slowdown in inflation took away pressure on the BSP to tighten its monetary policy, Tetangco said.

The BSP uses interest rates as a tool to control inflation. An increase in its key policy rates encourages bank to park more funds in the BSP, therefore siphoning off excessive liquidity in the system and tempering inflation.

Shares close lower

From page B1

points at 2,996.39, off a low of 2,979.39. It touched an intraday high of 3,010.75. The broader all-share index fell 5.39 points to 1,866.85.

Gainers outnumbered losers 62 to 48, while 50 were unchanged. There were 3.2 billion shares traded valued at P4 billion.

"The market has been see-sawing which goes to show that for now the resistance level will hold for the meantime," said Jose Vistan AB Capital Securities.

"The strong run-up that broke the 3,000 level earlier this week is still susceptible to corrections; it's not yet a solid rally," he added. *AFP*

Forex reserves hit all-time high of $23B

From page B1

The country's strong foreign reserve build-up last year was supported by proceeds from the government's foreign borrowings, remittances from overseas Filipino workers, foreign direct investments and, in recent months, the strong influx of portfolio investments.

Tetangco said the yearend GIR could cover about 4.4 months' worth of imports of goods and payments of services and four times the country's short-term debt based on original maturity and 2.3 times based on residual maturity.

Residual maturity refers to outstanding external debt with original maturity of one year or less plus principal payments on medium- and long-term loans of the public and private sectors falling due within the next 12 months.

Compared to the month-ago level, the GIR was also higher by $350 million following the significant accumulation of reserves from the BSP's foreign exchange operations and income from investments abroad as well as the national government's deposit of the proceeds of its various program loans.

"The current level of reserves was accumulated even after the $220-million prepayment of the BSP's remaining credit to the IMF as well as the national government's $72-million prepayment on various Asian Development Bank loans," Tetangco said.

"Without these prepayments, the GIR level would have been higher by about $292 million," he said.

The BSP alone has pre-terminated a total of $1.17 billion in foreign debts since the start of 2006.

During the last quarter of the year when OFW remittances were seasonally strong while inflows to the local stock market were robust, the BSP was also spotted by currency traders sporadically buying dollars to smoothen the peso's appreciation.

The peso ended 2006 on a high note alongside favorable economic prospects that boosted portfolio inflows as well as strong OFW remittances. The local currency gained about 7.6 percent since the start of the year to close at 49.03 to a dollar from 53.09 at end-2005.

The Philippines' decision to pre-terminate a post-program monitoring arrangement with the IMF with the prepayment of remaining debts with the Fund also contributed to the upbeat market sentiment.

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of Jan. 5, 2007)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
FINANCIAL					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	7.2	7.3	7.1	7.3	47,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	45	45	44	45	586,300
Bank of the Phil. Islands	64.5	65	64	64.5	1,153,600
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	400
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.46	0.47	0.46	0.46	3,500,000
Equitable Pci Bank Inc.	82	82	81.5	81.5	1,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51	52	50	52	1,616,200
Philippine National Bank	45.5	45.5	45	45	39,100
Phil. Savings Bank	48	48	48	48	15,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	24	24	23.5	23.75	171,700
Security Bank Corp.	66	67	66	67	88,400
Union Bank of the Phil.	48.5	49.5	48.5	49	97,400
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
Air Kimeng Fin. Corp.	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	21,000
Bankard Inc.	0.8	0.8	0.77	0.77	120,000
Citiseconline.Com Inc.	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	76,000
First Metro Invest. Corp	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	10,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1625	1625	1625	1625	80
Pci Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	289,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	287.5	290	287.5	290	1,390
Sun Life Financial Inc.	2020	2020	2020	2020	160
Ivantage Corp.	1.66	1.66	1.64	1.66	1,091,000
INDUSTRIAL					
ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
Pnoc Energy Dev. Corp.	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.5	49,214,000
First Gen Corp.	55.5	55.5	55.5	55.5	164,800
First Phil Hldgs Corp	68	70	67.5	70	693,000
Manila Electric Co. A	59.5	59.5	58	58.5	200,500
Manila Electric Co. B	59	59.5	58	59	1,574,100
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.3	9.4	9.2	9.3	2,820,000
Petron Corp.	4.1	4.1	4.05	4.05	5,755,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.16	1.16	1.16	1.16	234,000
FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85	31,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	20.5	20.5	20.5	20.5	21,200
Jollibee Foods Corp.	44	44	43	43	1,079,100
Pancake House Inc.	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3	5,000
Rfm Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	155,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.75	2.8	2.75	2.8	346,000
San Miguel Corp. A	64	64.5	64	64.5	91,600
San Miguel Corp. B	75.5	76	75	75	774,600
Alliance Tuna Int'l. Inc.	2.18	2.2	2.16	2.2	1,056,000
Universal Robina Corp	19	19	18.75	18.75	1,038,700
CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
Southeast Asian Cement	1.24	1.26	1.18	1.26	80,358,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.25	3.4	3.25	3.35	1,692,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.7	81,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	6	6	6	6	4,000
Republic Cement Corp.	4.25	4.25	4.2	4.2	210,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies, Inc	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.6	1,749,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.61	20,000
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.69	0.69	0.68	0.69	17,170,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.21	0.225	0.21	0.22	18,100,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	14,000,000
Ayala Corp.	560	565	550	560	106,670
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.66	0.66	0.63	0.63	490,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	7.3	7.8	7.2	7.8	1,465,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.0575	0.065	0.0575	0.0625	84,800,000
A. Soriano Corp.	3	3	2.95	2.95	855,000
Apc Group Inc.	0.37	0.39	0.37	0.38	25,620,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.01	0.011	0.01	0.01	33,000,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.12	1.12	1.12	1.12	660,000
Atn Holdings Inc.	1.78	2	1.68	2	273,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp	3.15	3.2	3.1	3.2	92,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.7	2.75	2.55	2.7	26,679,000
Dmci Holdings Inc.	6.3	6.5	6.3	6.5	2,725,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.95	4.25	3.9	4.25	3,264,000
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.32	1,990,000
House of Investments Inc.	1.98	2.06	1.98	1.98	430,000
J.G. Summit Holdings, Inc	10.25	11	10.25	11	630,300
Keppel Holdings	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	50,000
Medco Holdings	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	2,430,000
Magnum Holdings, Inc	3.85	4.2	3.85	4.05	441,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	1.58	1.64	1.58	1.62	3,328,000
Pacifica	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	2,400,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.195	0.2	0.195	0.2	870,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	40,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.165	0.17	0.165	0.165	8,490,000
Sm Investments Corp.	320	320	315	320	415,140
South China Resources Inc	1.04	1.04	1.02	1.02	110,000
Seafront Resources Corp.	1.56	1.56	1.56	1.56	30,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co	0.29	0.32	0.29	0.31	5,820,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.135	0.135	0.13	0.135	860,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	16	16	15.75	15.75	118,687,300
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.5	0.5	0.45	0.45	190,000
Belle Corp.	1.16	1.22	1.16	1.18	17,303,000
A Brown Company Inc.	1.64	1.7	1.64	1.68	156,000
Cityland Development Corp	1.66	1.68	1.66	1.68	50,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.43	0.47	0.43	0.47	24,190,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	326,000
C & P Homes Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	20,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.32	1,860,000
Elb Realty Developers Inc	0.2	0.22	0.2	0.22	700,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.56	0.58	0.56	0.57	22,370,000
Edsa Prop. Holdings Inc.	1.56	1.6	1.56	1.58	783,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.0625	0.0625	0.0625	0.0625	2,000,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.68	1.72	1.66	1.72	27,878,000
Gotesco Land Inc.	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	100,000
Gotesco Land Inc.B	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	100,000
Interport Res.	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	32,000,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.46	0.5	0.45	0.5	11,700,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.67	0.73	0.67	0.69	5,430,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	5.5	5.8	5.5	5.6	1,586,000
Mrc Allied Ind. Inc.	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	110,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	15.75	16	15.75	15.75	2,318,300
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.64	0.7	0.64	0.7	20,850,000
Sm Development Corp.	2.95	3.25	2.95	3.1	12,279,000
Sm Prime Holdings Inc.	11.75	12	11.5	11.75	8,953,600
Suntrust Home Dev. Inc.	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	300,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.105	0.105	0.1	0.1	9,000,000
SERVICE					
MEDIA					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp	19.5	19.75	19.5	19.5	22,100
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp	1	1	1	1	30,000
TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc	2.08	2.1	1.98	2.02	30,116,000
Globe Telecom Inc	1270	1275	1260	1260	50,380
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.9	6.9	6.7	6.9	1,666,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2520	2525	2500	2505	111,520
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.235	21,780,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	1,000,000
Ionics Inc.	2.2	2.24	2.2	2.24	255,000
Ipvg Corp.	3.7	3.95	3.7	3.95	1,276,000
Ism Communications Corp.	0.0575	0.06	0.0575	0.06	18,400,000
Music Semiconductors Corp	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.28	165,000
Transpacific Broadband	2.04	3	2.04	2.95	5,513,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.035	0.031	0.034	1,203,600,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Aboitiz Trans. Sys. Corp.	1.36	1.42	1.36	1.42	671,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	21	21.75	21	21.75	327,100
Keppel Phils. Marine, Inc	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	70,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1,000
HOTEL & LEISURE					
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	1.98	2	1.98	2	1,483,000
Manila Jockey Club	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	25,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	200,000
EDUCATION					
Centro Escolar University	8.8	8.8	8.8	8.8	3,000
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
Macroasia Corp.	2.12	2.14	2.1	2.1	356,000
Paxys Inc.	19.25	19.25	19.25	19.25	34,500
Philippine Seven Corp.	3.65	3.65	3.65	3.65	10,000
MINING & OIL					
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.7	178,000
Apex Mining Co., Inc B	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8	391,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.011	146,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.6	9.6	9.4	9.6	1,579,000
Benguet Corp. A	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1	5,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.9	20,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.25	0.26	0.25	0.26	23,660,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.27	0.28	0.26	0.27	1,700,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.023	0.023	0.023	0.023	61,200,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.025	0.025	0.025	0.025	7,500,000
Omico Corp.	0.014	0.014	0.013	0.014	627,000,000
Philex Mining Corp.	3.9	4	3.9	3.95	7,141,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.25	18.25	18	18	220,000
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.8	0.8	0.78	0.78	2,400,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.56	1.56	1.5	1.5	2,320,000
OIL					
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	1,990,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.012	0.013	0.012	0.013	288,900,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.013	0.013	0.012	0.013	70,100,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	1.14	1.16	1.12	1.12	1,104,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	1.14	1.18	1.14	1.14	363,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	9.8	10	9.7	10	163,000

CURRENCIES

January 5, 2007 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.764117	1.000000	48.8570
Japan	Yen	0.006420	0.008402	0.4105
United Kingdom	Pound	1.484679	1.943000	94.9292
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.098112	0.128399	6.2732
Switzerland	Franc	0.619823	0.811162	39.6309
Canada	Dollar	0.649208	0.849618	41.5098
Singapore	Dollar	0.497472	0.651042	31.8080
Australia	Dollar	0.599590	0.784683	38.3373
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.026782	2.652450	129.5907
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.203759	0.266660	13.0282
Brunei	Dollar	0.495858	0.648929	31.7047
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000085	0.000111	0.0054
Thailand	Baht	0.021464	0.028090	1.3724
United Arab Emirates	Dirham	0.206836	0.272279	13.3055
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.308700	63.9392
Korea	Won	0.000810	0.001074	0.0525
China	Yuan**	0.097851	0.128057	6.2565
Argentina	Peso	0.248898	0.325733	15.9143
Brazil	Real	0.356730	0.466853	22.8090
Denmark	Kroner	0.134159	0.175574	8.5780
India	Rupee	0.017303	0.022645	1.1064
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.217079	0.284091	13.8798
Mexico	New Peso	0.070199	0.091870	4.4885
New Zealand	Dollar	0.532969	0.697496	34.0776
Norway	Kroner	0.120737	0.158008	7.7198
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012561	0.016439	0.8032
South Africa	Rand	0.107992	0.141329	6.9049
Sweden	Kroner	0.110073	0.144053	7.0380

Asia stocks slip; yen gains on hopes of a rate rise

Market awaits decision of US Federal Reserve on key rates

SINGAPORE—ASIAN STOCKS fell on Friday as investors locked in profits from recent gainers such as Honda Motor and awaited a key US jobs report for a health check on the world's largest economy.

An ABC News report that North Korea was preparing a new nuclear test fueled selling in Tokyo and Seoul share markets but US and South Korean officials said that they saw no evidence to suggest Pyongyang was on the brink of such a test.

The yen rose across the board on expectations the Bank of Japan could raise interest rates this month, while gold and oil clawed back ground after stiff overnight losses.

Britain's FTSE-100 stock index was expected to open 15-17 points lower, bookmakers predicted.

"If the (US job) numbers are even a little bit higher or lower the market's going to take that as a big factor" to predict the trend for currencies, said Hidenori Kato, head of forex sales and trading at Societe Generale in Tokyo.

The nonfarm payroll figures due yesterday afternoon could offer insight into whether the US Federal Reserve will cut rates in coming months to help shore up the slowing economy.

But most analysts expect the US central bank to hold rates steady in early 2007 while it monitors a cooling housing market for any signs that it is impacting the broader economy.

Japan's Nikkei ended 1.5 percent lower with auto, steel and energy stocks under heavy selling pressure, after it hit an eight-month closing high on Thursday.

Recent gainers, such as Honda and steel stocks, succumbed to profit taking and a stronger yen, which will erode profits for exporters. Honda fell 3 percent.

South Korean shares suffered their third consecutive daily fall and worst opening week of a new year since 2000 as fears of a North Korean nuclear test added to concern about slowing export growth and lower consumption at home.

The KOSPI ended down 0.8 percent but above nine-week lows.

Bigger losses were contained as this week's slump in oil prices lifted transport stocks such as Korean Air Co., which gained 2 percent.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index was little changed despite losses in Chinese oil plays while Australian shares fell 0.2 percent to a two-week low as lower copper prices weighed on miners BHP Billiton Ltd. and Rio Tinto Ltd.

The euro fell more than 1 yen from the day's high on Friday, as the Japanese currency advanced on expectations the Bank of Japan may raise interest rates soon.

Japanese government bond futures edged up from a two-month low, taking their cue from stronger US Treasury prices, but dealers said buyers were wary of chasing the market too high because of the prospects for a Bank of Japan rate rise.

Oil edged up toward $56 a barrel after plunging nearly 9 percent over the past two days as traders fretted over growing US fuel inventories and unusually mild temperatures in the world's top energy user.

Gold bounced after another sharp drop in New York spurred buying from jewelers and investors, but players were careful about chasing the yellow metal ahead of the US payroll report.

Spot gold matched Thursday's 1-week low of $621.50 an ounce before regaining strength and hitting an intra-day high of $623.50 an ounce. *Reuters*

Bernanke earns praise

WASHINGTON—AFTER ALMOST A YEAR on the job, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke earns high marks from analysts and former Fed officials for plain talk and skillful use of monetary tools in an uncertain economy.

Under Bernanke, the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee raised interest rates three times and then stepped to the sidelines, ending a two-year rate-hike campaign.

Bernanke's Fed has held rates steady since June while signaling ongoing concern about inflation, even as calls grew louder that rate cuts might soon be needed prevent an already sluggish economy from slipping further.

"I think he's called it right so far," said Alice Rivlin, a former vice chair at the Fed.

Analysts say Bernanke, who has just four weeks to go until his one year anniversary as Fed chief on Feb. 1, may have timed perfectly the end of the rate hike campaign, which left benchmark interest rates at 5.25 percent.

"They stopped the tightening cycle at about the right moment, despite the fact that oil prices were going up at that moment," Rivlin added. "The decision was made not to go any higher, and that turned out to be the right thing."'

While his policy instincts seemed sharp, Bernanke has been less adept in his role as a public figure.

His candor to CNBC television reporter Maria Bartiromo at a social event in April roiled financial markets when she reported he believed traders overestimated his willingness to hold interest rates steady (the Fed raised rates at its next meeting).

A few days earlier, Bernanke had told Congress the central bank could at some point pause its rate-raising campaign, even if inflation risks were elevated.

Analysts said the testimony was a factor in a subsequent rise in financial market inflation expectations.

Bernanke "told me it is worrisome to him that anyone would think of him as dovish, that that feeling did permeate last week," Bartiromo said in her report. *Reuters*

Businessmen wearing sacred Shinto vests pray before the altar at Kanda Myojin Shrine in Tokyo. Thousands of Japanese businessmen left nothing to chance on Thursday as they packed into shrines to start the new year with prayers for a robust economy.

REUTERS

Thai tourism hit by bombings

BANGKOK—UP TO 15 PERCENT of the four million tourists expected to visit Thailand in the first three months of the year may cancel their trips after deadly bombings in Bangkok, a leading think-tank said Friday.

The blasts—which killed three people and injured dozens, including nine foreign tourists—are expected to cost the sector 20 billion baht ($555 million) in revenue, according to the Centre for Economic and Business Forecasting.

The center had earlier forecast that 13.45 million people would visit Thailand this year, generating tourism income of 428 billion baht ($11.8 billion).

"The number of tourists, both Thais and foreigners, will drop from our previous projection. The impact on tourism from the bombs will be felt not only in Bangkok, but also across the country," said the center's director Thanavath Phonvichai.

Army-installed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont warned Friday that Thais should brace for at least months of political unrest, saying the government might not be able to prevent more bombings.

Tourism is a key money spinner for Thailand, generating about 6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Apart from tourism, Thanavath said consumption and investment would also suffer, with combined losses expected to total 30 billion baht.

The damage would result in a half-point decline in the first quarter GDP from original projection of 4.0 percent, he added.

The center, however, maintained its GDP forecast for 2007 at a range of 4.0-5.0 percent, compared to 4.5-5.5 percent anticipated by the Bank of Thailand.

"If there are no new attacks, confidence among consumers and businesses will improve in the second quarter," said Thanavath.

"In the worst-case scenario, the economic growth for 2007 could drop by 1.0 percent," he added. *AFP*

AirAsia new long-haul budget carrier

KUALA LUMPUR—THE FOUNDER OF leading Southeast Asian budget carrier AirAsia on Friday announced the launch of a new long-haul low-cost airline, AirAsia X, which will fly to China, India and Europe.

The new airline will be operated by Malaysian carrier Fly Asian Express (FAX), which is closely linked to AirAsia with common shareholders, and currently operates rural air services on Borneo island.

"AirAsia X will offer an innovative product offering ... (and) passengers a level of comfort and convenience suited for long-haul travel," said AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes who is also the major shareholder in FAX.

Fernandes said AirAsia X will begin operating in July from the low-cost terminal at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), with daily services to locations in China, India and Europe.

He said AirAsia X was still finalizing its fleet requirements but was considering getting Boeing 777-300s and Airbus 330-300s.

The company said in a statement that AirAsia X will also tie up with other low-cost carriers "in order to increase connectivity and route network."

It did not name the partners but The Star newspaper reported this week that AirAsia is planning to team up with Richard Branson's Virgin Group and EasyJet to launch "the world's first low-cost global network."

AirAsia was launched as a budget carrier in December 2001 with just two aircraft.

It now offers more than 100 domestic and international flights to Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines. *AFP*

GM's top executive vows to keep global leadership over Toyota

CEO Wagoner says he likes being No. 1

DETROIT—IF TOYOTA MOTOR CORP. HAS eyes on taking the title of world's largest automaker from General Motors Corp. next year, it will not happen without a fight.

In an interview Thursday, GM Chief Executive Rick Wagoner said his company has room for growth worldwide and will forcefully defend its title.

"I like being No. 1, and I think our people take pride in it," he told a small group of reporters at GM's headquarters. "It's not something we're going to sit back and let somebody else pass us by."

Toyota last month announced a global production target of 9,42 million vehicles for 2008, increasing the odds that it will surpass GM. That would easily exceed the 9.2 million vehicles GM is estimated to have produced in 2006.

Wagoner would not reveal the company's 2007 production targets, but he said GM has the capacity to build more than 9.42 million cars worldwide.

The company will fight for every sale, he said, but will stay within its strategy to rely on quality products to make money and less on selling cars and trucks with incentives.

If Toyota does pass GM, Wagoner said he would not be pleased.

"It won't be a happy day for me, but I've lost basketball games before in my life. You get ready and you learn and you go back the next day, and that's what we'll do," he said. "We're going to fight to keep the position, and if one day we lose it, we'll fight to get it back."

As its US market share shrank when high fuel prices drove people away from trucks and sport utility vehicles, GM cut production last year.

But it is rolling out multiple new products and Wagoner said the North American market should be healthier this year.

Toyota, with a better balance of cars and trucks, capitalized on the consumer shift and raised its market share by two percentage points last year.

For the first time, the company passed DaimlerChrysler to become the No. 3 auto seller in the United States.

Toyota is not concerned about becoming No. 1 globally, said spokesman Irv Miller. The company is working to keep its quality high, focus on customers and roll out its new Tundra full-sized pickup truck, he said.

"A perceived sales challenge for global leadership is not something we're even thinking about," Miller said.

Also in the interview, Wagoner said he agreed with Ford CEO Alan Mulally's statements that the United Auto Workers may have to make significant concessions in upcoming contract talks to keep GM competitive.

While he would not be specific about what GM would seek in bargaining with the union, Wagoner said the company faces a cost disadvantage to competitors that needs to be addressed.

But he would not say if GM would seek labor cost parity with Toyota and Honda Motor Co., both of which have significant US manufacturing operations.

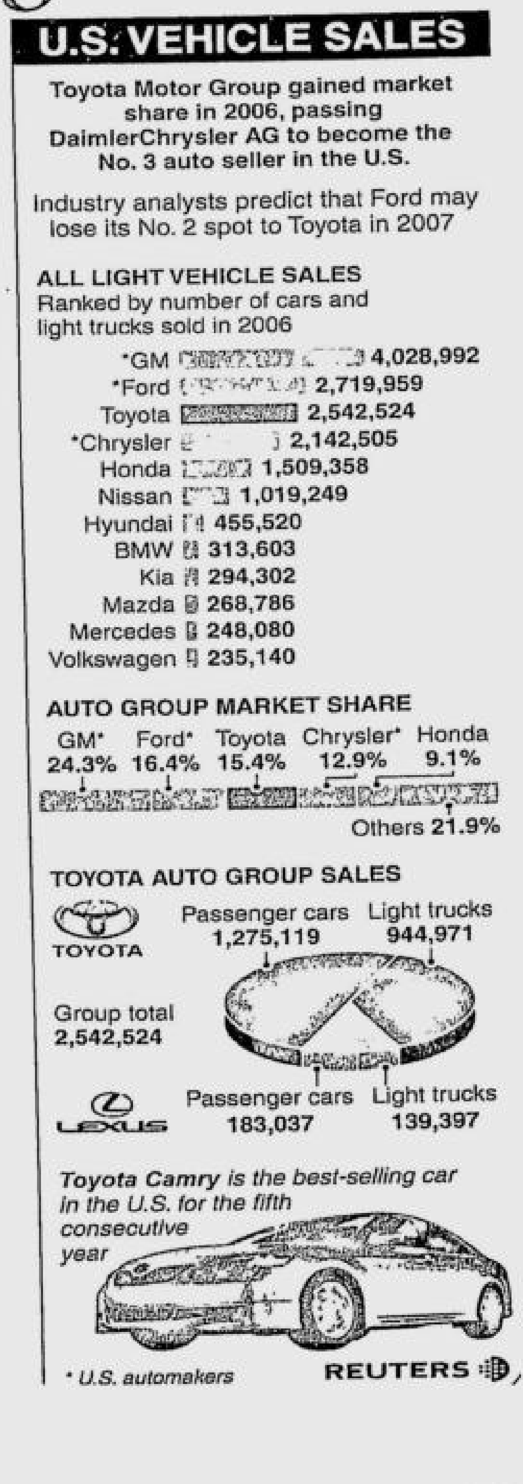
The UAW will begin negotiating new labor contracts with Ford, GM and DaimlerChrysler in the fall.

Like Ford, GM already is talking with the UAW in advance of formal contract talks later this year, Wagoner said.

He said the UAW already has helped the company with health care concessions and buyouts that will reduce its hourly work force.

But GM is "not fully competitive" in all parts of its business, he said.

"We need to continue to make progress in the '07 negotiations," he said. "If we can make progress and if we can do it on an accelerated basis, I think that would be terrific for us ... But improving competitiveness is fundamental. I don't disagree with what Alan said on that at all." *AP*



NOTICE

Please take notice that the Securities and Exchange Commission has approved the change in the corporate name of **SEAWORLD MARINE SERVICES, INC. to GLOBAL GATEWAY CREWING SERVICES, INC.** on December 11, 2006.

CAPT. ROMMEL T. GACUTAN
President and COO

Republic of the Philippines
Province of Bukidnon
Provincial Capitol 8700
OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR
Bids and Awards Committee
Tel (088) 221-2141 & (088) 813-3353

Project Reference Number: 2006–15-A
Name of the Project: TALAKAG WATER SUPPLY
Location of the Project: TALAKAG, BUKIDNON

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Provincial Government Bukidnon, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites registered with and classified by the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) to apply for eligibility and to bid for the hereunder project:

Name of project	:	TALAKAG WATER SUPPLY
Location	:	Talakag, Bukidnon
Brief Description	:	Const. of 1 unit intake box, installation of G.I. uPVC pipes with a length of 28.781 meters, Construction of River Crossing Structure at Balang River and Construction of 1 unit Ground Reservoir (26,000 Gallons capacity) and 2 units Ground Reservoir with a capacity of 6,000 gallons each.
Approved Budget For the Contract	:	P 26,000,000.00
Contract Duration	:	365 Calendar days including rainfall allowance

Prospective bidders should possess a valid PCAB License applicable to the contract with a value of at least **50% of the ABC AND HAVE KEY PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT** available for the prosecution of the contract and **must be registered in the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC).** The Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Post-qualification of the lowest calculated bid shall be conducted.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conference(s), Evaluation of Bids, Post-Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulation (IRR).

The complete schedule of activities is listed, as follows:

Activities	Schedule	
	From	To
1. Advertisement/Issuance of Eligibility Statement Forms Documents	Dec. 31, 2006	Jan. 12, 2007
2. Deadline for Submission of Letter of Intent and Eligibility Statement Form	Jan. 13, 2007	Jan. 22, 2007
3. Issuance of Notice of Eligibility	Jan. 23, 2007	
4. Issuance of Bidding documents	Jan. 25, 2007	
5. Pre-Bid Conference	Jan. 31, 2007 @ 2:00 p.m.	
6. Opening of Bids	Feb. 14, 2007 @ 2:00 p.m.	

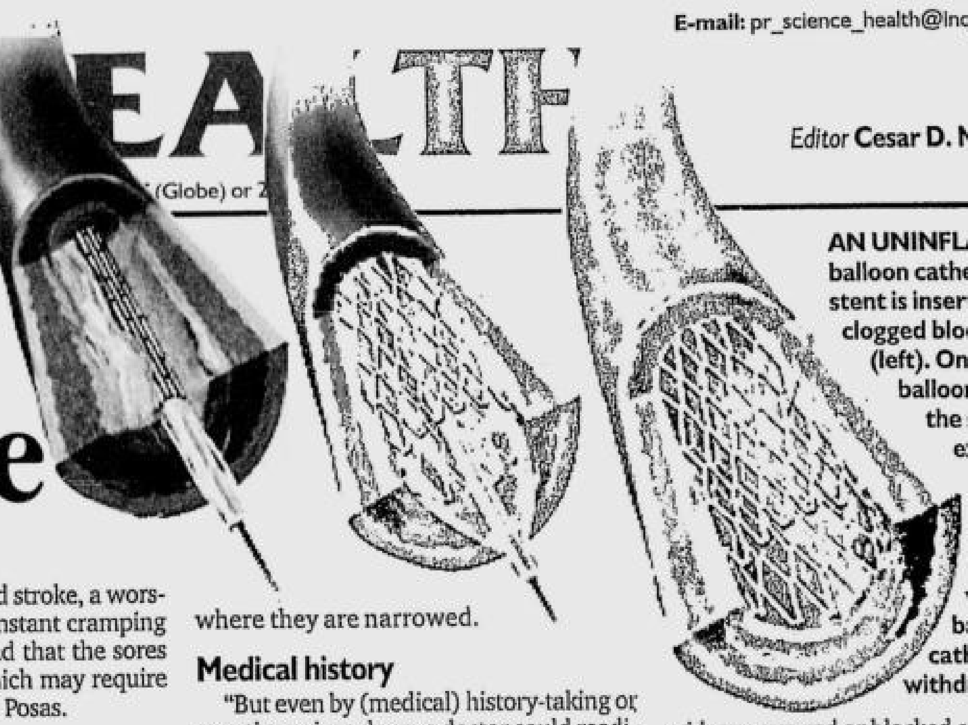
Bid Documents will be availalbe only to prospective bidders upon payment of a non-refundable amount of **P 5,000.00**/set to the cashier of Provincial Treasurer Office.

The Provincial Government of Bukidnon assumes no responsibility whatsoever to compensate or indemnify bidders for any expenses incurred in the preparation of the bid.

Approved:
(Sgd.) JOSEFREDIE F. FLORES
Provincial Administrator
BAC Chairman

(PDI--Dec. 31, 2006 & Jan. 6, 2007)

When leg cramps mean something else



AN UNINFLATED balloon catheter with stent is inserted to the clogged blood vessel (left). Once the balloon is inflated, the stent also expands and locks in place where it stays put when the balloon catheter is withdrawn (right).

By Charles E. Buban

YOU BARELY WALKED A FEW meters when you felt some cramping in the back part of your lower leg. You stop for a few minutes and the pain goes away. You continue on, and the pain comes back a little while later.

Instead of dismissing the incident as just part of getting older or for failing to do some warmups, why not head to your doctor's office?

"That particular cramp-like pain could be claudication, most often a symptom of peripheral vascular disease, a potentially serious but treatable circulation problem," warned cardiologist Fabio Enrique Posas of St. Luke's Medical Center.

PVD refers to a cluster of conditions in which the blood vessels especially those that supply the various tissues and organs become narrowed or clogged.

Atherosclerosis

The most common cause of PVD is atherosclerosis, a gradual process in which fatty material collects along the inside walls of the arteries.

"In time these fatty materials thicken, harden and may eventually block the flow of blood, in this case depriving the limb muscles of their much-needed oxygen and nutrients when they needed the most like during exercise," Posas explained.

However, the doctor warned that PVD is likely to be disregarded because most individuals with the condition do not experience symptoms and even if they did (aside from claudication, a person may also develop a sore on the leg or foot that does not heal, feel a cooling or color change in the skin of the legs or feet, or experience hair loss on lower legs), they would likely dismissed them and and won't seek medical help.

ST. LUKE'S Dr. Posas: People should be aware of the potential dangers of untreated PVD.

Growing challenge

Posas laments that PVD represents a growing medical challenge worldwide for doctors who fight to prevent stroke, loss of limbs or other debilitating conditions in their patients.

He said claudication alone, though it happens on and off, is a serious warning symptom because people who have it are also at increased risk for heart attack and stroke.

The doctor also added that even without the serious and sometimes fatal consequences of heart attack and stroke, a worsening PVD could cause constant cramping pain even while at rest and that the sores may lead to gangrene, which may require amputation later," warned Posas.

Inexpensive test

The doctor suggested taking an ankle-brachial pressure index, a simple, noninvasive test for screening and diagnosing presence of PVD.

This inexpensive yet accurate test takes the ratio of the blood pressure at the ankle and in the arm while a person is at rest.

"A normal resting ABI means that the blood pressure at the ankle is the same or greater than the pressure at the arm, and therefore, no significant narrowing or blockage of blood flow," Posas explained.

An abnormal ABI, however, would mean further tests, which would include taking computed tomography scan, magnetic resonance imaging scan, or an ultrasound scan of the arteries, to map out the patient's arteries, and show where they are narrowed.

Medical history

"But even by (medical) history-taking or questionnaires alone, a doctor could readily tell if a patient is positive for PVD," Posas said.

He said smoking is the most powerful risk factor for developing PVD: "It is believed that the process of atherosclerosis and artery narrowing is almost guaranteed to begin in anyone who has smoked regularly for more than a few months."

Posas urged that it is never too late to make a change by giving up smoking as well as getting more exercise, taking medications and watching one's diet.

But if lifestyle modifications alone aren't sufficient angioplasty or surgery may be necessary.

Advancements

"Many advancements have been and are being developed in the treatment of PVD. People should be aware that here in the Philippines, we now have so many competent doctors who could skillfully and safely perform these advanced procedures," Posas assured.

Angioplasty, Posas explained, is a nonsurgical procedure that could be used to widen narrowed or blocked arteries.

"A thin tube called a catheter with a deflated balloon on its tip is passed into the narrowed artery segment. Afterward, the balloon is deflated and the catheter is withdrawn. In some cases, a cylindrical, wire mesh tube called stent is placed in the narrowed artery together with the catheter. When the balloon is inflated, the stent also expands and locks open where it stays in the spot, keeping the affected artery open," he explained.

Posas said the procedure (that takes not more than six hours to perform) is minimally invasive considering that the catheter is inserted through a tiny incision—about the size of a match head—in the limbs or groin.

"People should be aware of the potential dangers of untreated PVD. One doesn't have to spend so much to be examined and even the very elderly patients should be motivated to seek out and demand assessment and treatment if they experience unusual pains or changes in their limbs as this could mean improvement in the quality of their life," he stressed.

Another virgin birth

DISCOVER

Massie Santos Ballon

JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, THE MEDIA excitedly reported that Flora, the Komodo dragon at the Chester Zoo in England, was due to become a mother. At the time, Kevin Buley, Chester Zoo's curator of Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates, reassured MSNBC that if the eggs had hatched around Dec. 25, none of the lizards would be named Jesus. As it is, the nearly 8-year-old lizard laid 25 eggs back in May 2006 and 8 of those could hatch at any time this month.

The reason for all the hype, though, is that Flora is a virgin; she's been at the zoo since she was a year old and hasn't been exposed to any male Komodo dragons since 1999. As Komodo dragons are supposed to reproduce when a male inseminates a female, the question of the eggs' paternity originally and understandably puzzled the zookeepers.

The need to breed

As reported in the Dec. 28 issue of the journal Nature, a team of researchers led by Phillip Watts at the University of Liverpool genetically profiled some of Flora's eggs that had collapsed early on and found that the lizard was indeed the sole genetic parent. The paper was also co-authored by Buley and another member of the Chester Zoo. In short, the Komodo dragon, isolated from its kind and feeling the need to breed, had parthenogenetically reproduced.

Parthenogenesis is the process by which offspring are produced without any male involvement. Very few vertebrate species use this method to reproduce; in the paper, Watts et al. note that the Argus monitor lizard might have also reproduced parthenogenetically recently.

Interestingly, Flora is not the first Komodo dragon who's chosen this reproductive route. In 2005, Sungai, a female Komodo dragon at the London Zoo, laid 4 viable eggs and became a mother the following January. This was several years after her last contact with a male dragon so researchers theorized that she either somehow stored the sperm from her last encounter or had parthenogenetically reproduced. Watts et al. also conducted a genetic profile on her offspring and the results, which also appeared in the Nature paper, proved the latter theory correct.

6 eggs

Sungai later met and mated with Raja, one of Flora's brothers. She laid 6 eggs, one of which hatched. Again, this baby lizard's paternity was checked (really, despite appearances, the Nature paper isn't only about paternity tests) and it was established that Raja was the father. Watts et al. note in the paper that Sungai's ability to reproduce sexually after doing so asexually "confirmed that parthenogenesis was not a fixed reproductive trait… and that asexual reproduction is likely to occur only when necessary." Given the authors' note that there are less than 4,000 Komodo dragons in the wild, and a quarter of these are mature females, it doesn't seem too far-fetched to suggest that the lizards are experimenting with ways to avoid extinction.

If the Komodo dragons and other animals on the verge of extinction, perhaps due to isolation or other factors, do eventually turn to parthenogenesis—either as the primary way to reproduce or simply as an alternative—Watts et al. worry that this inbreeding would reduce the species' chance of surviving an outbreak of disease. One of the reasons sexual reproduction—and males—have existed for as long as they have is that the unique combination of genes that is given to each child by both its parents increases genetic diversity.

At the very least, Flora's and Sungai's parthenogenetically produced offspring delay the Komodo dragon's extinction. It remains to be seen if the Chester Zoo will introduce Flora to a male Komodo dragon after her offspring are hatched to see if she will continue to follow in the late Sungai's footsteps. There is no word at this time on whether or not the 6 Wise Authors of the Nature paper, much less the Chester zookeepers, encourage gifts of frankincense and myrrh.

* * *

E-mail the author at massie@massie.com.

Christmas Puzzle winners

EUREKA!

Queena N. Lee-Chua

NINETY-FOUR READERS SENT solutions before the deadline of the 2006 Christmas Puzzle contest. They were awarded points based on correctness, logical reasoning, and most of all, clarity of explanation. Allendy Tan [allendy54@yahoo.com] was the only reader to receive a perfect score of 5 points, and he will receive an autographed copy of my recent book "In Love with Science: Outstanding Young Filipino Scientists Tell Their Stories" (Anvil, 2006), edited with PhilRice executive director Leocadio Sebastian.

Runners-up with a total of 4.5 points were Willy Calinawan [willycalinawan@yahoo.com], Jennifer Reyes [jojoreyes59er@yahoo.com], Arnel J. Amparo [ajamparo@yahoo.com], Katherine Marie D. Tanyu [km_tanyu@yahoo.com], Ryan Sylam Liwanag [rsliwanag@yahoo.com], Jhoanne Santiago [jsantiago@br.brgtmo.com], and Viking Logarta [viking_l@pacific.net.ph]. Each will receive a copy of another book I edited, titled "Magis, Volume Two: Stories of Learning, Striving, and Serving" (Ateneo Office of Research and Publications, 2006). Winners can claim their prize from the Ateneo College Math Department, 3rd floor, Science Education Complex, Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

Readers who got 4 points were Stephanie Uymatiao [steffy167_mani2x@yahoo.com], Kenneth Co [felitanco@gmail.com], Ian Gelito [ian_gelito@yahoo.com], and engineer Joseph Constance M. Castro [rock_finn@yahoo.com]. Gerard Gumban [qraduv@gmail.com] got 3.5 points. Clarysse Medina [faust_scam31@yahoo.com], John Bernard Ong [johnbernard_ong@yahoo.com.nz] and Noel Estoperez [nrej2k3@yahoo.com] got 3 points. Glenn Villaluz [glennvillaluz@gmail.com] 2 points, and Emet Tenerife [emet.tenerife@gmail.com] 1 point. Congratulations!

Here are the puzzles and solutions.

Reverse Tic-Tac-Toe

Puzzle 1. Your friend is playing a variation of tic-tac-toe, with the symbols X and O. However, here the person who first places three same symbols in a row, column, or diagonal does not win. He loses. You are in the middle of a game. You play O and it is your turn. What move must you then make in order to win? Explain your solution.

X	X	
O		
X		

Allendy Tan explains: There are only four possible moves I can make. Let us look at each one. One, if I place O in the second row second column, then my friend can place his move anywhere and the game will result either in tie or a loss for me. Two, if I place O in the second row third column, I will lose immediately if my friend places X in the third row second column. If he places X in any other spot, he loses. Three, if I place O in the second row third column, then my friend can place X in the third row second column, which results in a tie. If my friend places X in any other spot, he loses. Four, if I place O in the third row third column, the result will either end in a tie or a loss for me. I conclude that I have two chances of winning and no chance of losing by placing O in the third row second column. So I will place O here. At best though, if my friend plays intelligently, the game will end in a tie. I can never make a move in order to get a sure win.

Katherine Marie Tanyu gives a more mathematical explanation: This version of the tic-tac-toe is called a misere game ("played to lose"). Misere is French for misery. By game theory, each player will choose a strategy that is best for him, given that his opponent is aware of what that strategy is. A 3 x 3 tic-tac-toe will more often than not result in a draw, given this assumption (like what happened in this case). But the best strategy to follow is for O to be placed in the third row second column. In this way, the player would have a lesser chance of completing a row or column, since the present row and column with the O in the grid do not interest this square. The worst strategy is to place the O in the second row third column, which is interested by the row and column with the O's. By playing the O there, the player is trapped by the X, forcing him to complete either the row or column first, thus losing the game.

Profit or Loss

Puzzle 2. Tessa bought two identical vases, but because of a sudden emergency, she had to sell them quickly. She sold them for P600 each. On one vase, Tessa made a profit of 20 percent and on the other vase, she lost 20 percent. Did she make or lose money on the whole deal? By how much? Show your solution.

Jennifer Reyes, who teaches at Angono National High School, says: For the first vase, P600 is equal to the price plus 20 percent of the price. 1.2 of the price is P600, so the price is P500. Tessa made a profit of P100 on the first vase. For the second vase, P600 is equal to the price minus 20 percent of the price. 0.8 of the price is P600, so the price is P750. Tessa lost P150 on the second vase. Therefore, Tessa lost P50 on the whole deal.

Jhoanne Santiago looks at the total sale and total cost. Since two vases were sold at P600 each, total sales are P1,200. The cost of the first vase is P500, and the cost of the second is P750, so total cost is P1,250. So Tessa lost P50 on the whole deal. (To be concluded next week)

* * *

Queena N. Lee-Chua is professor of mathematics and psychology at Ateneo de Manila University. Contact her at blessbook@yahoo.com.

Depression in the elderly

MEDICAL FILES

By Rafael R. Castillo, MD

THIS NEW YEAR, I HAVE RESOLVED to be more diligent in answering queries from readers. A housewife from Quezon City who requests to remain anonymous writes that her mother, who's 82 years old, has been depressed for almost a year now following the death of her spouse. She has lost her zest for life and even verbalizes her wish to rejoin her husband soon. Our reader wishes to know if this is still a normal reaction.

Many do not realize that the elderly can be at a higher risk to develop depression. The physical and psychosocial problems, challenges and difficulties that an elderly person faces in their daily life increase as they age and compound their risk of developing depression. Unfortunately, their symptoms may not be taken seriously by their children, and may just be dismissed as a call for attention. Some even have the wrong impression that episodes of depression are an expected transition from elderly to senility.

Normal reaction

Feeling low following the loss of a spouse, close relative or dear friend is a normal and expected reaction. Emotional support by family and friends may be all that is necessary for the depressed individual to come to terms with reality and bring back the zest in one's life. But if the depression persists for more than a few months, especially if it progresses over time, then psychotherapy (with a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist) is required.

It is important however to rule out physical ailments and diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia which could mask depression and/or can also be the cause of depression. Some patients, being treated for depression, may subsequently manifest full-blown signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. It would be ideal that elderly patients with prolonged depression, such as our patient here, be seen first by a neurologist or brain specialist to rule out Azheimer's or early dementia. Once this is ruled out, psychotherapy and treatment with antidepression medications may be started.

Depression, be it in the young or elderly, would present the same way; but with elderly persons, the depression tends to last for longer periods of time than it does in the young. Depression has also been shown to potentially increase an elderly person's risk of death.

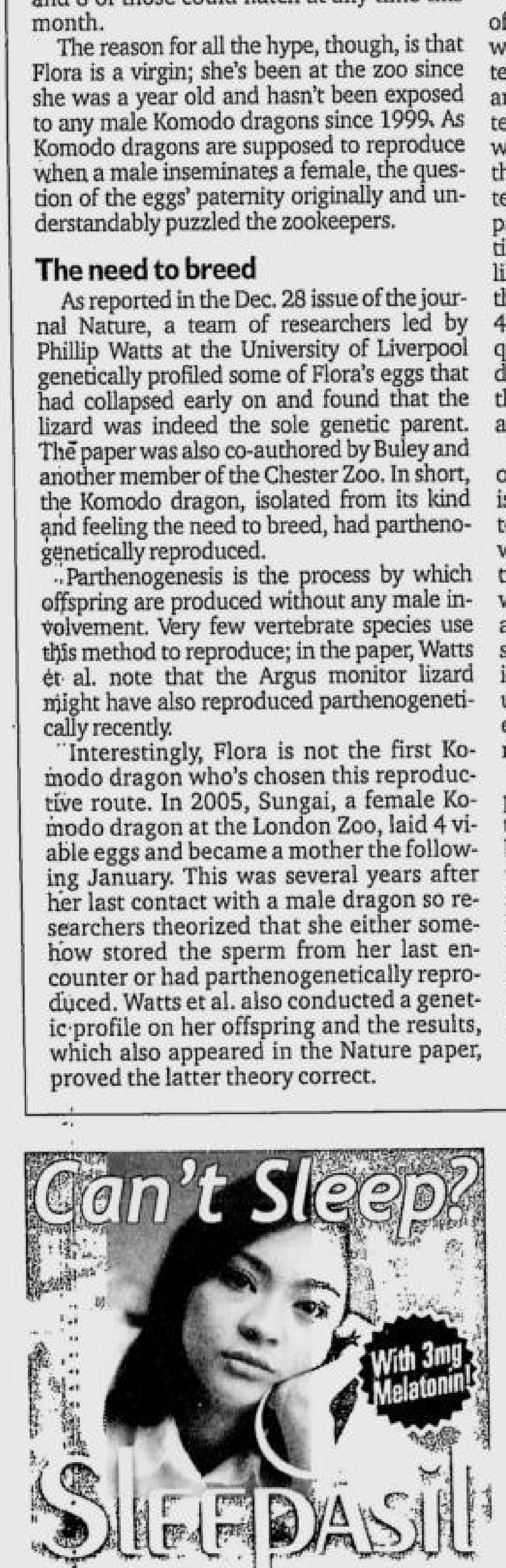
As with depression at any age it is often triggered by a morbid event and for depression in the elderly, it can be the death of a spouse, close friends or a disability that makes them dependent on others. Hence, some amount of depression is fairly common following a heart attack or stroke in the elderly. Part of the rehabilitation process is boosting up the patient's morale.

Serious health issue

Depression also presents a serious health issue in the elderly, in a way that may not be so significant in younger persons. The elderly lack the resiliency which younger persons have, and depression can have adverse effects on the senior's immune system, making them prone to various illnesses including serious infections and cancers. These may be the ultimate cause of their death.

Older women are confronted with additional physical challenges with all the hormonal changes that they continue to go through after menopause. On top of that, women are continually stressed with their multitasking functions.

Depression should be regarded as a potentially serious problem in the elderly. But the good news is that it can be treated; and with proper treatment which includes a strong emotional support structure by family and friends, we can bring back the smile in our elderly patients with depression.



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T.G.

Meeting of the Board of Directors and Chi[illegible] Officers

ASEAN CONFEDERATION OF EMPLOYERS (ACE) TURNOVER CEREMONY. The 32nd ACE CEOs' and Board of Directors Meeting was capped by the turnover ceremony of the ACE flag from the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (Ecop) to the Employers Confederation of Thailand (Ecot), with Ecot President Jit Temchareonsuk (4th from left) taking over the ACE presidency from Ecop President Rene Y. Soriano (5th from right) for the period 2007-2009. Also in photo are Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) Deputy Honorary Secretary Steven Goh; Ecot Executive Director Siriwan Romchatthong; SNEF Research and Projects Senior Executive Chua Ker Sin; Employers Association of Indonesia (Apindo) Chair Sofjan Wanandi; Ecop Director General Vicente Leogardo, Jr.; Ecop Chairman Miguel B. Varela; and Apindo Industrial Relations Officer Ida Widayani.

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PNOC-ENERGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
Energy Complex, Merritt Road
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Tel. No. 893-1320, Local 5282

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND BID

The PNOC-Energy Development Corporation is inviting all interested suppliers to apply and submit sealed bids for the supply and delivery of the following:

1 set of 27-1/2" Master Bushing under FDM 63316
Approved Budget: PHP 2,345,800.00

Eligibility forms and bidding documents shall be available for issuance at the above address c/o Ms. Maria Cristina Lynn M. Mercado starting **January 2, 2007** and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of P400.00 per document.

For purposes of clarifying certain matters, a pre-bidding conference shall be held on **January 10, 2007, 2:00 p.m.** at the above address.

Applications for eligibility and sealed bids shall be submitted to, and registered with the PNOC-EDC Supply Management Department at the above address, and thereafter dropped in the padlocked bid box thereat not later than 2:00 p.m. **(Supply Management Department Wall Clock Time)** of **January 24, 2007**. Public opening of bids shall follow immediately thereafter. **Late bids shall not be accepted.**

Prospective bidders shall signify conformance to the bidding terms and conditions, as required, and shall ensure the same through proper submission/execution. Source of funding is from Internal Cash Generation of PNOC-EDC. All bids should be within the Approved Budget for the Contract in order to qualify.

PNOC-Energy Development Corporation reserves the right to annul the bidding process, to reject any or all bids, to waive any informality in the bids received and to accept such bid which is most advantageous to PNOC-EDC without thereby incurring liability to the affected bidder or bidders or any obligation to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the ground(s) for PNOC-EDC's action.

Chairman, Bids and Awards Committee II

(PDI–Jan. 5, 2007)

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National Capital Region
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cor. General Malvar St., Malate, Manila

NOTICE OF FILING OF APPLICATION/S FOR ALIEN EMPLOYMENT PERMIT/S (AEP/S)

Notice is hereby given that the following companies/employers have filed with this Regional Office application/s for Alien Employment Permit/s:

Name and address of Company/Employer	Name of Foreign National	Position
K-MOBIS MOTOR TRADING CO., INC. #30 Kabignayan St., Tatalon, Quezon City	Young Kag Kwon	Supervisor
LAFARGE CEMENT SERVICES (PHILIPPINES), INC. 18/F PBCom Tower, Ayala Ave., cor V.A. Rufino St., Makati City	Samir Calrae	President/Chief Executive Officer
COPACABANA BRAZILIAN RESTAURANT CO. 1834 M.H. Del Pilar St., Malate, Manila	Taesung Kim	Operations Manager
FILACE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY CORP. G/F Amber Sq., No. 7 St. Ja. Maria Escriva Dr., Ortigas Ctr., Pasig City	Jeongah Han (w/o Yoon)	General Manager for Operations
WANGFANGYU ENTERPRISES, INC. Rm. 909, Federal Tower Bldg., Dasmariñas St., Binondo, Manila	Manish Chandani	Assistant Marketing Manager
ARINSO INTERNATIONAL PHILIPPINES, INC. Unit C, 6/F Cyber One Bldg., Eastwood City, Libis, Quezon City	Jan R. P. O. Mees	Country Manager
GLOBAL STEEL PHILIPPINES (SPV-AMC) INC. Unit 2703, 27/F 88 Corporate Center, Sedeno cor. Valero Sts., Salcedo Village, Makati City	Akilesh Banzal	Assistant General Manager-Marketing
MANILA MANDARIN HOTEL INC. Makati Ave., Makati City	Jesper Vilsoe	Executive Assistant Manager for Food & Beverage
SYKES ASIA INC. 26/F Robinsons Summit Center, 6783 Ayala Ave., Makati City	Rudolf Franciscus Maria Gulickx	Payroll and HR Representative
SYKES ASIA INC. 26/F Robinsons Summit Center, 6783 Ayala Ave., Makati City	Thi Thu Trang Nguyen	Vietnamese Client Support
KUK-CHE UHAGON TRAINING ACADEMY, INC. Rm. 400 Acre Bldg., 137 Malakas St., Diliman, Quezon City	In Ja Jong	Korean Language Instructor
XPERT AIR SERVICES, INC. 7 Ideal St., Mandaluyong City	Ah Mi Han	Consultant
XPERT AIR SERVICES, INC. 7 Ideal St., Mandaluyong City	Hyo Jung Jin	Consultant

If you have any information/objection to the abovementioned application/s please communicate with the Regional Director.

LOURDES M. TRASMONTE
Regional Director

(PDI–Jan. 6, 2007)

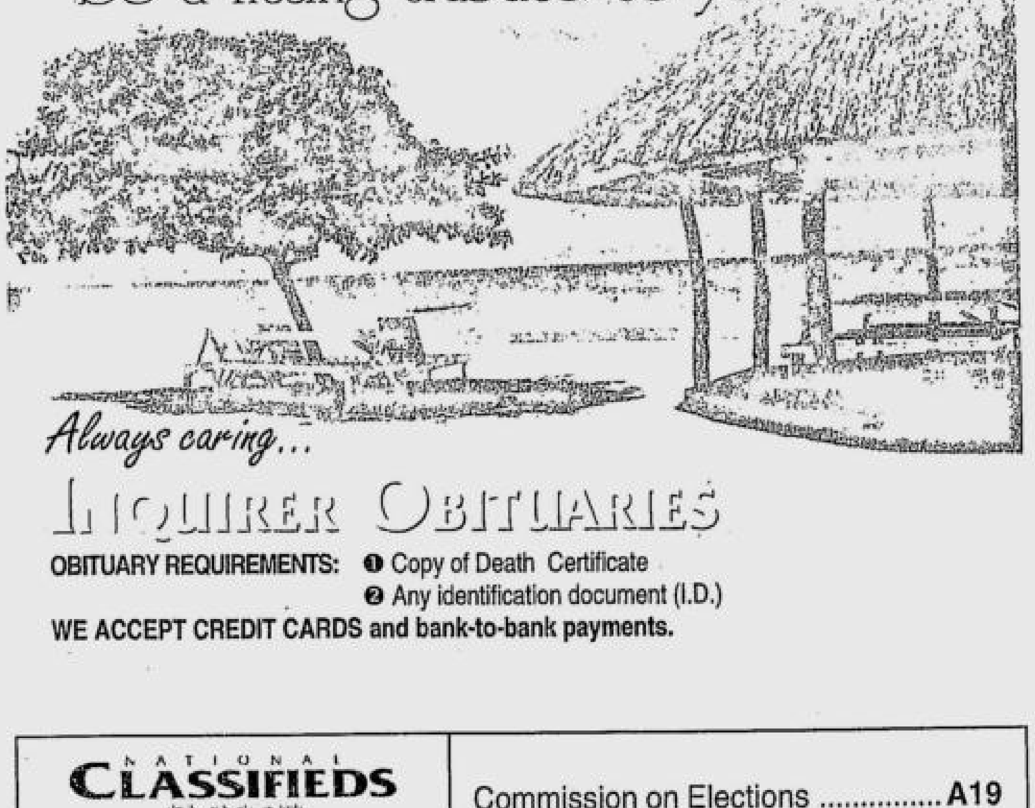
OBITUARIES

The Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
wish to announce the entrance into eternal life of

Sister Cathleen O'Neill, MM
(Sister Paula Cathleen)
on January 2, 2007 at the age of 77
at the Maryknoll Sisters Center in New York.

She had been a Maryknoll Sister for fifty-two years. She taught at Maryknoll College and Maryknoll High School, Lupon, Davao Oriental.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your



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INQUIRER OBITUARIES

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS: ❶ Copy of Death Certificate
❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

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ROSALINDA MEÑES MOTA

Past President, Auxiliary to the Phil. Medical Association;
Auxiliary to the Phil. Federation of Private Medical Practitioners;
Auxiliary to the Manila Medical Society

peacefully passed away, in the grace of our Lord on January 4, 2007 and joined her husband **JOSE O. MOTA, JR.** and son **ROBERTO.**

She is survived by her children, **JOSE III** and **JOCELYN PELEA; ANA MARIE** and **RAYMOND;** sister and brothers **EDITHA (†)** and **SERVILLANO DE LA CRUZ, SERAFIN JR., RODOLFO** and **CELINE ONGPIN;** sisters and brother-in-law **NATIVIDAD** and **GERONIMO DANGO (†), CECILIA, RODOLFO** and **LUCY SANTOS** and **ZITA;** nephews, nieces and other relatives request your prayers for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her body lies in state at St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori Parish, Magallanes, Makati City.

Interment will be on Tuesday, January 9, 2007 at the Manila Memorial Park, after the 9:00 a.m. Mass.

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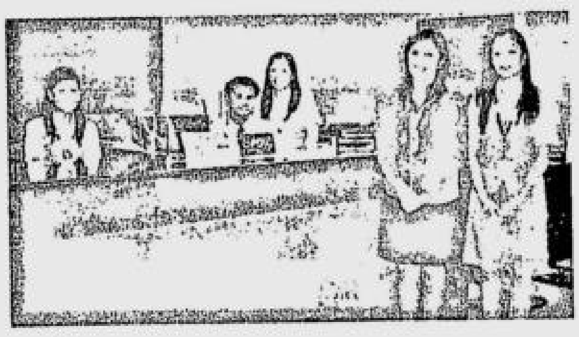

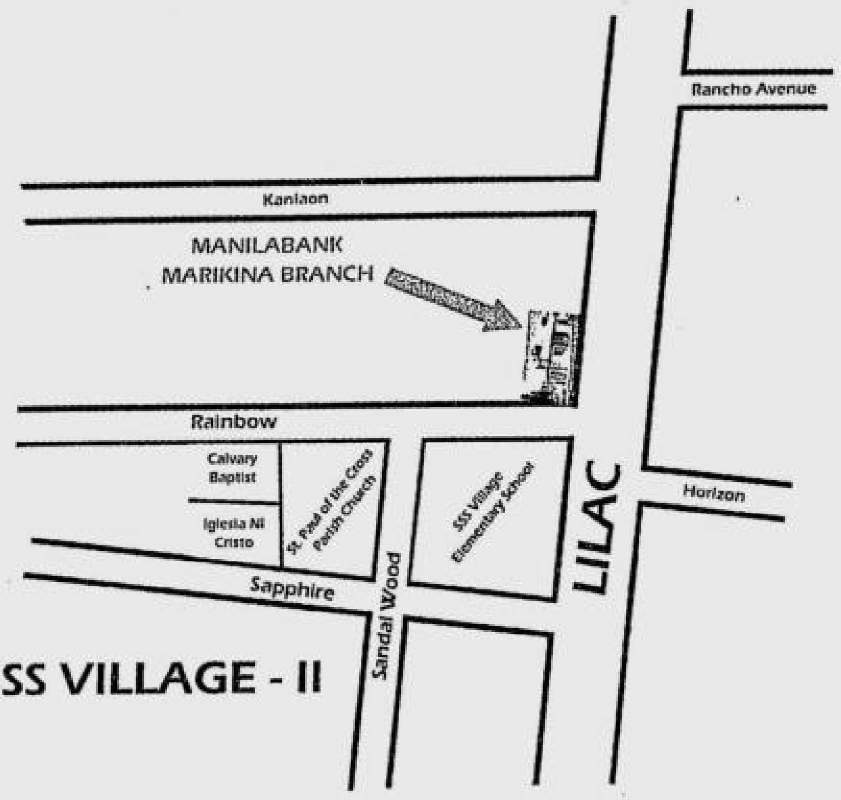
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PLDT, Globe launch plans for OFWs

Low-cost packages for small businesses

By Riza T. Olchondra

THE COUNTRY'S TWO BIGGEST telecommunications companies have embarked on an entrepreneurship drive that offers overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) low-cost business packages.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) has repositioned its myDSL Internet Café Plus as a business opportunity for OFWs looking for ways to start a business here.

The myDSL Internet Café Plus is an all in one package for as low as P35,000 down payment and a monthly fee of P4,000. The package includes five PCs, Internet connectivity and merchandising support.

PLDT's retail business group head, Butch Jimenez, said the telco was targeting about 2,000 Internet café stations or more by the first quarter of 2007 from this offering alone.

Globe Telecom and wireline unit Innove Communications have also created a low-cost broadband package for families of Filipino migrant workers.

Called "Globe Negosyo," the project targets OFWs seeking to start or are engaged in small businesses such as sari-sari stores, bakeshops and kiosk retailers. They can take advantage of Globe Broadband with free PC and Globelines landline service for as low as P1,995 a month for a 384 kbps connection or a one Mbps connection plus a desktop and landline for P2,495 a month.

"We're giving our OFWs with existing businesses here an opportunity to augment their income by adding Globe Negosyo package to their businesses. With a very minimal investment, they will get a chance to earn more from payphone use, Internet use, and IDD and NDD calls," said Globe Marketing-SME business group head Ailene Averion.

Averion added that OFWs who have yet to start their own business could easily tap Globe Negosyo with hardly any risk due to the very small capital involved.

She added that aside from OFWs and their families, Globe Negosyo is also available to other operators of micro businesses in the country.

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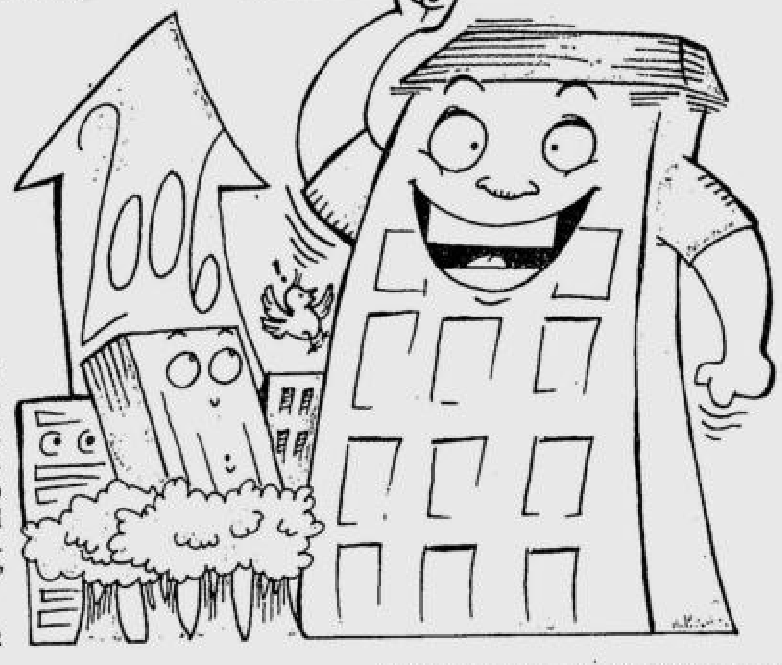
PROPERTY

Editor **Cesar D. Mangawang**

Double-digit growth for residential sector



By Tessa R. Salazar

THE YEAR 2006 HAS shaped up as a significant year for the Philippine property sector, realizing analysts' predictions that it would double the five percent growth the industry registered in 2004, basically due to the increasing demand for both housing and condominium sectors.

Eric Soriano, ERA Philippines' country president and CEO, said that the "optimism" on hitting double-digit growth in real estate covered the residential segment in selected growth areas.

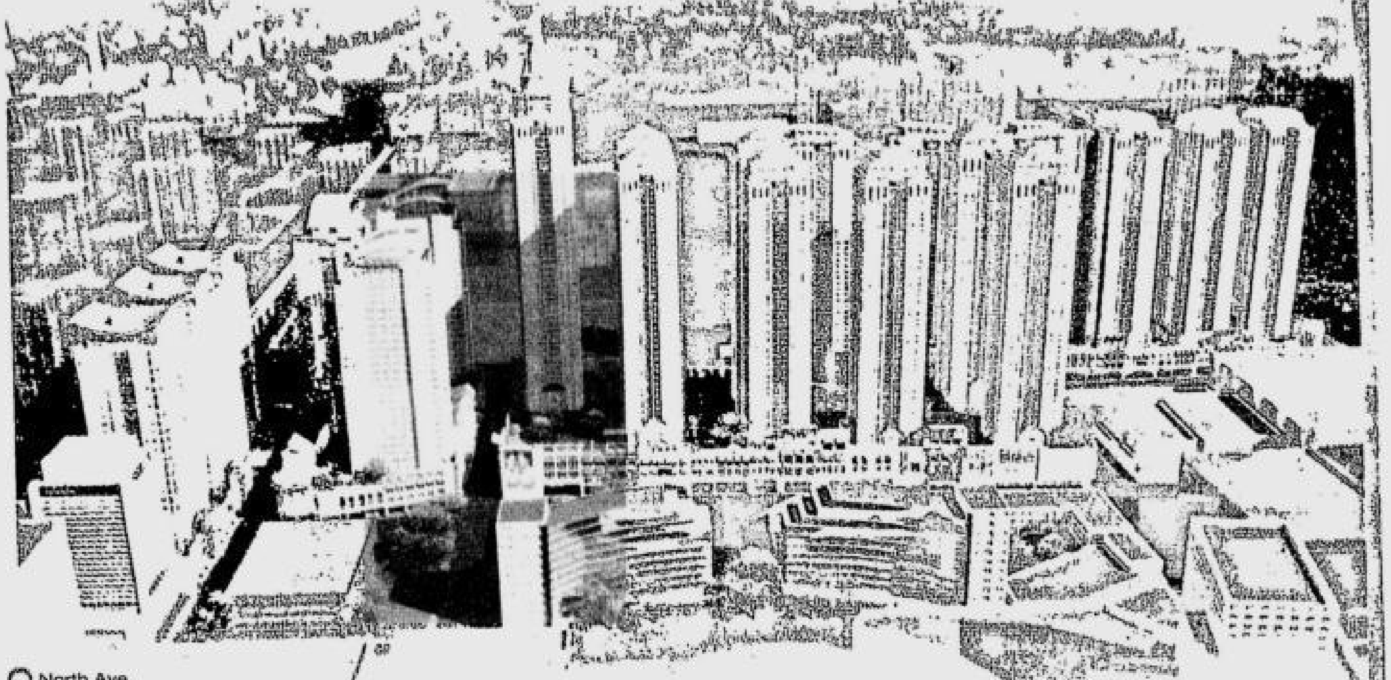
"By way of consistent demand, double-digit growth is currently being experienced at the Global City where a building frenzy is taking place," Soriano says.

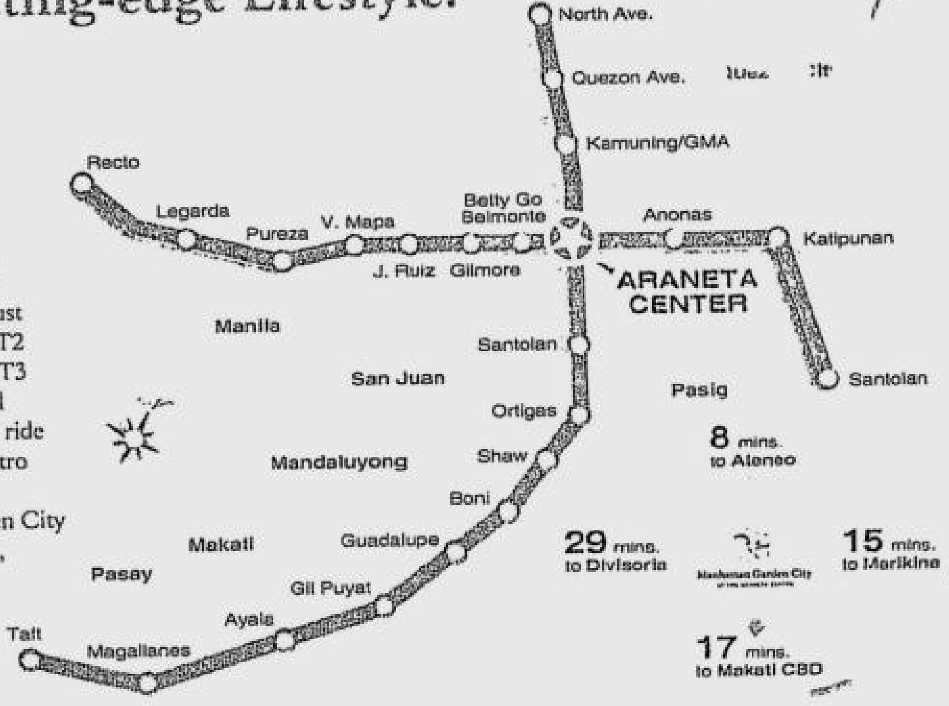
"Almost every street zoned as residential district has a condominium under construction, about to be completed or being boarded up signaling some form of groundbreaking. The beehive of activity has extended to Mckinley Hill where a slew of residential and custom-built BPO (business process outsourcing) developments are under construction," he adds.

DOUBLE-DIGIT/ B2-2

Manhattan Garden City
AT THE ARANETA CENTER

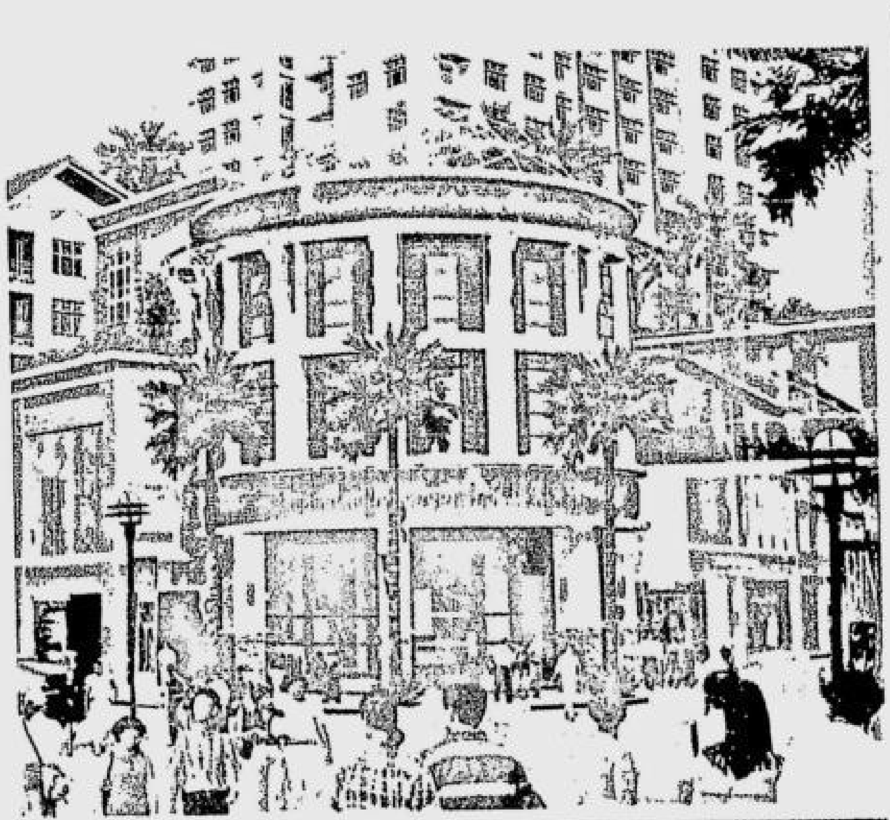
Connecting You to the Metro's
Most Important Destinations.
And to a Cutting-edge Lifestyle.





The Manhattan Garden City is the country's first transit-oriented development, linking you to not just one but two train systems: the LRT2 along Aurora Boulevard. And MRT3 along EDSA. So you're just a stroll away from a quick and traffic-free ride to virtually all major points of Metro Manila.

What's more, Manhattan Garden City connects you to the shops, offices, restaurants and entertainment centers at the Araneta Center. So you can live, shop, play and move like never before.



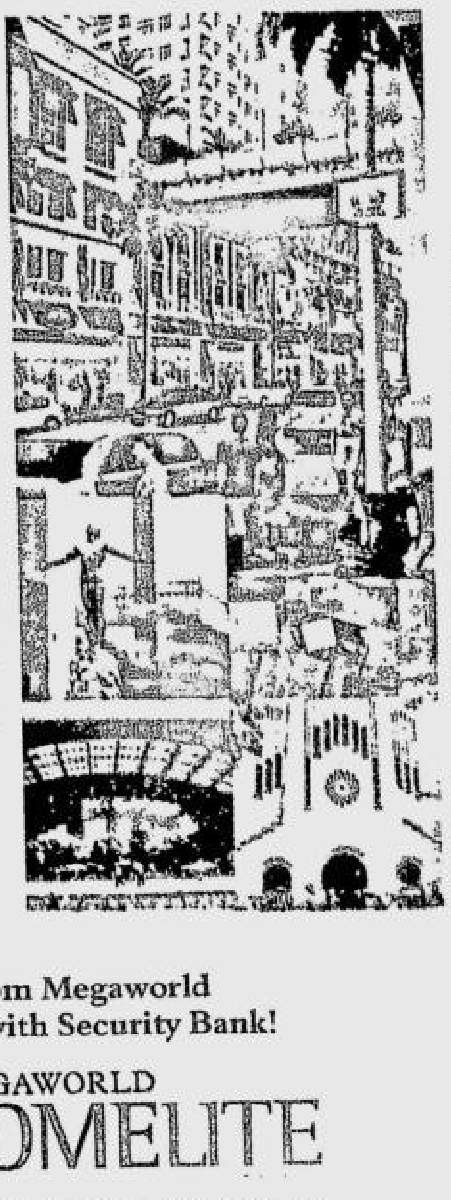
Easy ride around the metro.

A 729-meter-long footbridge standing four stories above the streets interconnects all 20 residential towers of your community. And leads you straight to the LRT2 and MRT3. There are lush greenery and benches. So going to the train stations is as enjoyable as a walk in the park.

With the trains close by, the power to go places is yours. Your children can be in Ateneo or UP in Quezon City in just 8 minutes via the LRT2. Or Manila's university belt in 19 minutes.

Your wife can get to Divisoria's bargain stores in 29 minutes. While you can be in your office in Ortigas in 6 minutes, Ayala Avenue in 17 minutes or Taft Avenue in 22 minutes through the MRT3. And since both lines link up with the LRT1, you can reach many more places in the metro than ever before.

This means you spend *less* time on the road. And *more* fun time with family and friends.



Easy link to the Araneta Center.

Manhattan Garden City enjoys direct access to the giant playground that's the Araneta Center. Your entry point is a **four-level transfer station** with a hotel-style lobby, grand staircase and four passenger elevators. The station connects you at the third level to the Gateway Mall and its Oasis floating garden. From there, you're just steps away from Rustan's, SM, Shopwise, Ali Mall, Farmers Plaza and the iconic Araneta Coliseum.

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Paradise in the Sky.

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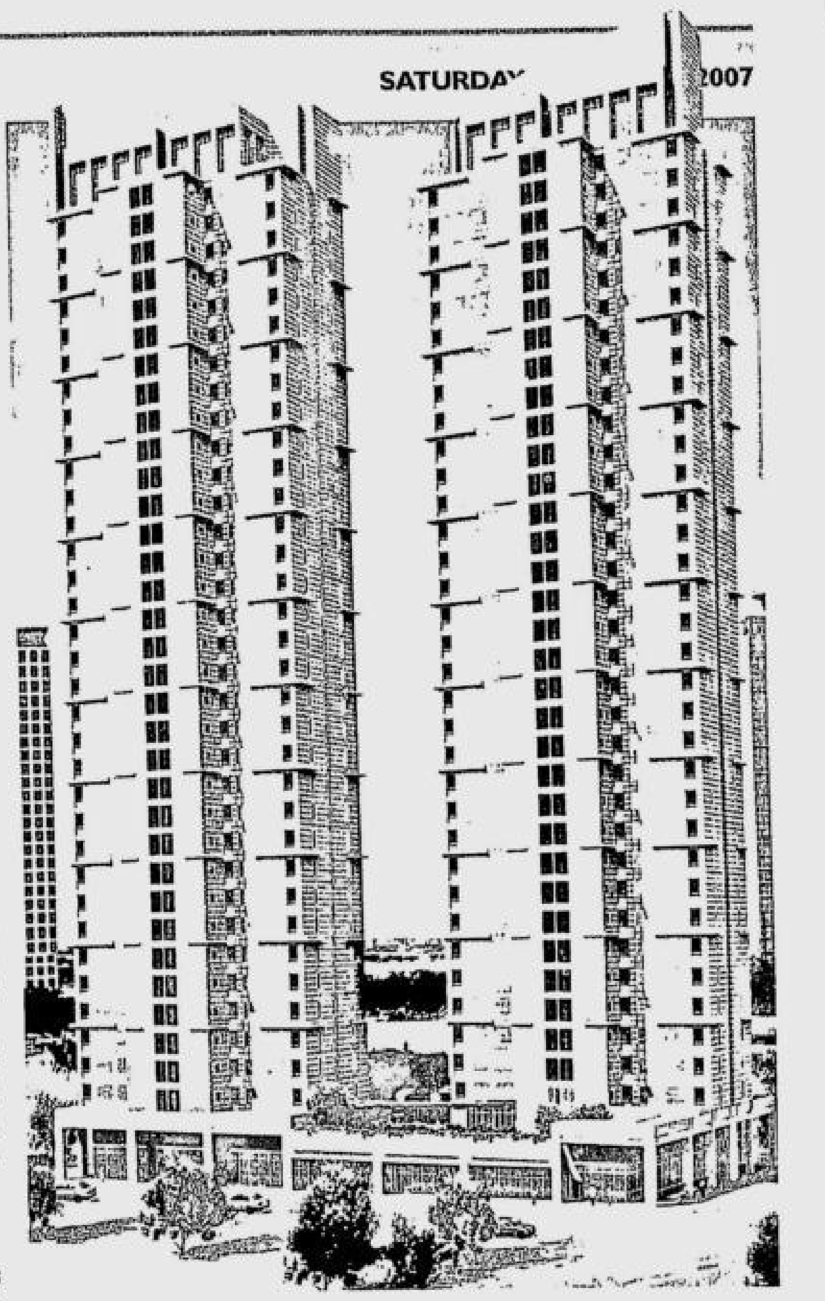
Unique offerings reap success for a Fort Bonifacio high rise



ARTIST'S rendition of a fully completed SoMa twin towers

By Charles E. Buban

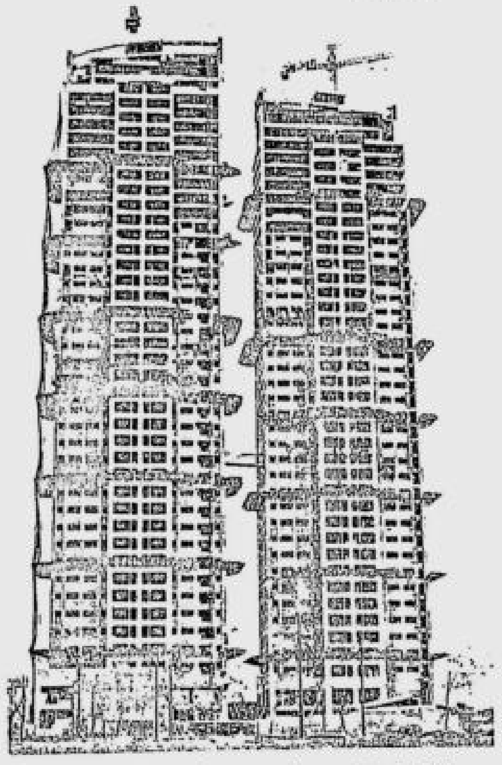
CENTURY PROPERTIES' SOUTH OF Market (SoMa) may just be another 42-story twin-tower residential condominium soaring above the Fort Bonifacio Global City skyline.

However, SoMa is no ordinary development as this posh development located on 11th Avenue (between 25th and 26th streets) is the country's first residential condo where units come fully fitted and completely furnished, offering 30 percent more in terms of unit value and costing 30 percent lower than comparable developments in the area.

The development is the most affordable within the Fort area since units are priced starting at around P3 million (and come at very attractive payment terms).

"How did we do it? Using a proven concept in the United States and Europe, Century Properties has a unique cooperative setup that makes investors partners instead of merely buyers. This approach translates to tremendous savings while residents get to enjoy the most luxurious amenities and lifestyle," explained Century Properties COO and SoMa managing director John Victor Antonio.

He added that as a unique co-development project, SoMa is VAT, documentary stamps and transfer taxes free, which translates to huge savings for investors.



SOMA developer's commitment to build four floors per tower per month allowed the development to be completed ahead of schedule.

Sold out in record time

With such unique offerings, the whole development sold out in record time, was able to finish construction way ahead of schedule, which is good news for SoMa's future resident as they will be able to move in much sooner.

In fact, last November, SoMa held its topping-off ceremony as the North Tower was finally completed one year ahead of its original completion date as well as the South Tower, which was completed one month ahead of its original completion date.

"Century Properties and partner, Meridien Development Group, have remained true to their commitment of building four floors per tower per month. This allowed SoMa to be completed ahead of schedule, delighting our partners," Antonio reported.

Push frontiers

Indeed, with SoMa, Century Properties continues to push frontiers in property development with its fast-paced and efficient construction timetables and systems.

"Because everything is done in-house, we are able to benefit from a lot of operational and purchasing efficiencies from our dedicated construction partner Nova Construction and Development Inc. Also, we make it a point to always overdeliver and exceed our client's expectations," Antonio assured.

Another excellent factor that makes SoMa attractive is the fact that the development is located in a fully masterplanned community strategically located and easily accessible to the Makati central business district, the Ortigas CBD and the new Ninoy Aquino International Airport terminal 3.

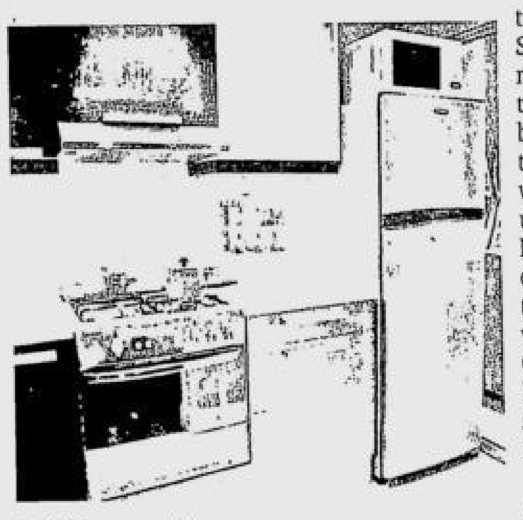
SOMA'S units come fully fitted and fully furnished with furniture and appliances.

Fully fitted, fully furnished

"Unlike other developments, SoMa residents will be moving in amid luxurious amenities and units that come fully fitted and fully furnished with bedroom, living room and dining room furniture and kitchen appliances, utilizing the same creative interior design team behind the award-winning Essensa East Forbes.

Century Properties' Essensa East Forbes is an ultra-luxury twin-tower project that is now hailed as the most prestigious residential condominium in the Philippines, as judged by Asiaweek magazine.

"SoMa's floor layouts—in one-, two-, or three-bedroom units of 39 sq m to 115 sq m area—are skillfully designed for flexibility as our partners can expand their unit sizes if the need arises. All units are corner units and have balconies thus, giving each a breathtaking and unobstructed view of the surroundings," Antonio assured.



ONLY top appliance brands come with every completed unit at SoMa.

To give an idea, Antonio explained that SoMa units facing north will get to enjoy the view of the Fort's bustling center while those facing west would get the spectacular greenery of the Manila Golf Club. The east-facing units on the other hand, get the view of the Ortigas CBD as well as Antipolo while those in the south would get the Makati City skyline.

But within SoMa's 233,000-sq-m complex, Century Properties will make sure that its residents will have plenty of places to go to like department stores, specialty shops, restaurants, theaters, amusement, entertainment outlets as well as flowers and fresh fruits market.

Double-digit growth for residential sector

From page B2-1

Kit Vergara, vice president of Philtown Marketing, echoes what most industry experts say that 2006 was the third year of a seven-year positive cycle. He adds that because the strength was fueled mostly by Filipinos residing abroad, high-rise residential condominiums as well as office developments buoyed by continued BPO strength were "very strong."

Says Crown Asia president Jerry Navarette: "Philippine real estate has enjoyed its best time for the last two years, with the industry growing by doubling its figures in 2006, recovering from a slight stall in 2005."

Growth areas

Soriano says significant growth was recorded in the residential segment, especially vertical residential buildings in growth areas like Fort Bonifacio, Eastwood City and Alabang.

He says that growth in horizontal developments has been consistent, primarily driven by real demand and OFW markets.

Navarette says: "The residential segment of real estate has gained tremendous growth driven by the increase in demands, both locally and from OFWs, for the housing sector and mainly for the vertical sector."

Vergara credits a stronger demand from overseas Filipinos through local developers' roadshows abroad. He says that his group successfully promoted Fairways Tower and The Metropolitan projects. Philtown had three roadshows in 2006, most of them in the US West Coast, where a big percentage of the Fil-Ams are.

"Also, as the real estate market weakened in the United States, US-based Filipinos looked to other places to invest. Aside from these, first generation Fil-Ams are now nearing their retirement and have amassed considerable buying power and they are now beginning to think about returning to Manila," Vergara says.

Housing

Navarette says the housing industry has enjoyed consistent growth given the demands of more Filipinos looking for either their first home or an investment for the family.

"Such demand (has come) from across socio-economic sectors (A to D) and covers both horizontal (house and lot and lots only) and vertical developments (condominiums)."

He adds: "Buyers have benefited from the increase in number of developers that fight tooth and nail to make their products the best offer in the market."

Interesting offers

Navarette says that with the improving peso-dollar rate, lower inflation and interest rates—most likely driven by the government's "aggressive economic drives"—and favorable economic forecasts, developers and their financial partners have come up with very interesting offerings, resulting in very affordable packages and payment schemes with "very low interest rates."

"On the other hand, the industry has continued to suffer from high costs of development and construction with prices doubling its figures versus five years ago," he adds.

Soriano says leisure developments continue to be out of reach by the majority but has remained steady with only a handful of innovative players offering world-class developments in the northern and southern growth corridors. This can qualify as a niche market and is expected to target the affluent 6 to 8 percent of all real estate buyers.

ERA Philippines says the retail segment, on the other hand, registered flat growth based on year-on-year retail sales. Soriano says that for retail developers to show a good report card to its shareholders, they must continue to expand these developments in provincial markets.

"There really is no other choice but to consider retail developments outside Metro Manila. At present, malls are being planned even in second-tier provincial areas," Soriano observes.

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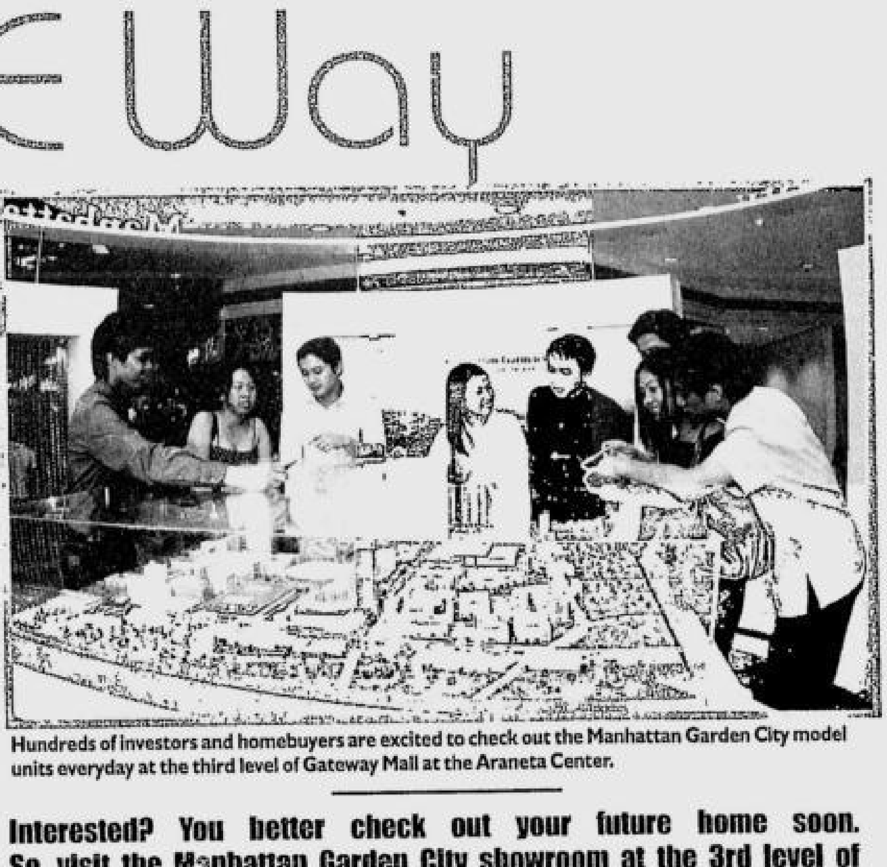
Now, owning your very first home will be affordable and easy on your budget. HOMELITE, the revolutionary product launched by industry leaders Megaworld Corporation and Security Bank, makes owning a home a reality for thousands of Filipinos.

Manhattan Garden City, which is strategically located at the Araneta Center and boasts of direct connection to the LRT and MRT, is one of the pilot projects of Megaworld for Homelite. Homebuyers can take advantage of the lowest interest rate ever - - 5.50% annually for a five-year loan term at no down payment. "This is ideal for investors who have a strong cash flow and who want to save years of paying interest," noted Megaworld Central Properties Inc. President Anthony Charlemagne Yu.

An ideal alternative is to stretch the home loan to 10, 15 or even 25 years to pay, with affordable monthly payments. The rates are also very attractive: from 8.50% to 11.00% annually and can be fixed for 25 years. "At the longest term of 25 years, our 22.5-square meter studio unit comes out at a very affordable P10,847 monthly. This is the best chance for many individuals to own a home, at prices they can afford," Yu added. The same flexibility of low interest and low monthly amortizations are also being offered for 1br and 2br units for families.

Through Homelite, this Manhattan Garden City studio unit comes out at a very affordable P10,847 monthly.



Hundreds of investors and homebuyers are excited to check out the Manhattan Garden City model units everyday at the third level of Gateway Mall at the Araneta Center.

Interested? You better check out your future home soon. So, visit the Manhattan Garden City showroom at the 3rd level of Gateway Mall. Or call 810-3333 or email inquire@themanhattangardencity.com for a viewing appointment.

Healthy stairs

STAIRS CAN BE DANGEROUS. Many people are hospitalized and even killed due to stair-related injuries in homes and workplaces. These accidents, in many cases, have been traced to badly designed stairs.

Risers are the vertical parts of stairs. They are measured from the top of one step to the bottom of the next. Treads are the horizontal parts or the width of the step. They are measured from the nosing or front corner to the face of the riser. Typical defects are risers that are too high or too low or irregular dimensions of both risers and treads.

Another typical defect of stairs is the inadequacy of handrails. This means handrails are difficult to grasp, especially for children and the elderly. Balusters are also spaced too far apart making it possible for children to slide through and fall.

Next would be treads that are slippery, especially at the nosing or front corner. Other defects include floor patterns that tend to blur the distinction between nosing and treads, and locating stairs where lighting is inadequate. This is particularly dangerous for the elderly and the visually impaired. Stair finishes that crack or peel off like substandard tiles or wood planks can cause people to trip and fall.

Interior staircases, found in many cramped spaces like townhouses and apartments, are designed to occupy as little space as possible. This results in very steep staircases that go straight up to the upper floor without any landing and without natural light and air. People who use this kind of stairs are always in a hurry to go up or down to get past this "black zone." Such staircases are accident-prone.

Some staircases are deliberately kept out of sight or located in the most unimportant part of the structure, thereby giving up the chance to create a visually inviting feature of a home or office.

GREEN ARCHITRENDS

Amado de Jesus

Staircases are very challenging to design and can be a major focal point in structures. They should be designed not only to comply with the building code but should also be comfortable to use and beautiful to look at. Its most important element, however, is safety.

Stair design, green architecture

Green buildings are primarily healthy buildings. This means that every building component that goes into the construction of a home or a building must consider this very important requirement. Staircases must be able to transfer people from one level to another comfortably and safely.

Basic green features

The starting point for any stair design is the width of the treads which should be at least 10 inches to allow people to place their feet on it safely. The riser should not be too high so it will be easy to climb. The maximum should be nine inches high with seven inches as ideal height. The most comfortable height for risers is about 6 and 6-1/2 inches.

As a guide, the height of two steps plus the depth of one step should equal about 24 to 26 inches. To illustrate, assume riser height to be 7 inches and the tread width to be 10 inches. Following the guide, 7 + 7 = 14, then add 10 inches (for the tread width) for a total of 24 inches.

Regarding stair widths, regularly used stairs should be at least 32 inches wide and considering that furniture needs to be carried up, it should preferably be 40 inches wide.

Care must also be taken to avoid steps with different heights. This usually happens when the first and last steps are either higher or lower than the others. This will almost surely cause many people to trip.

Handrails are an essential part of the staircase. They should be smooth and splinter-free with enough clearance to avoid tight spots where the hand could get caught.

Baluster spacing is best kept between four or six inches so that children cannot stick their heads through and possibly fall down.

Disadvantages

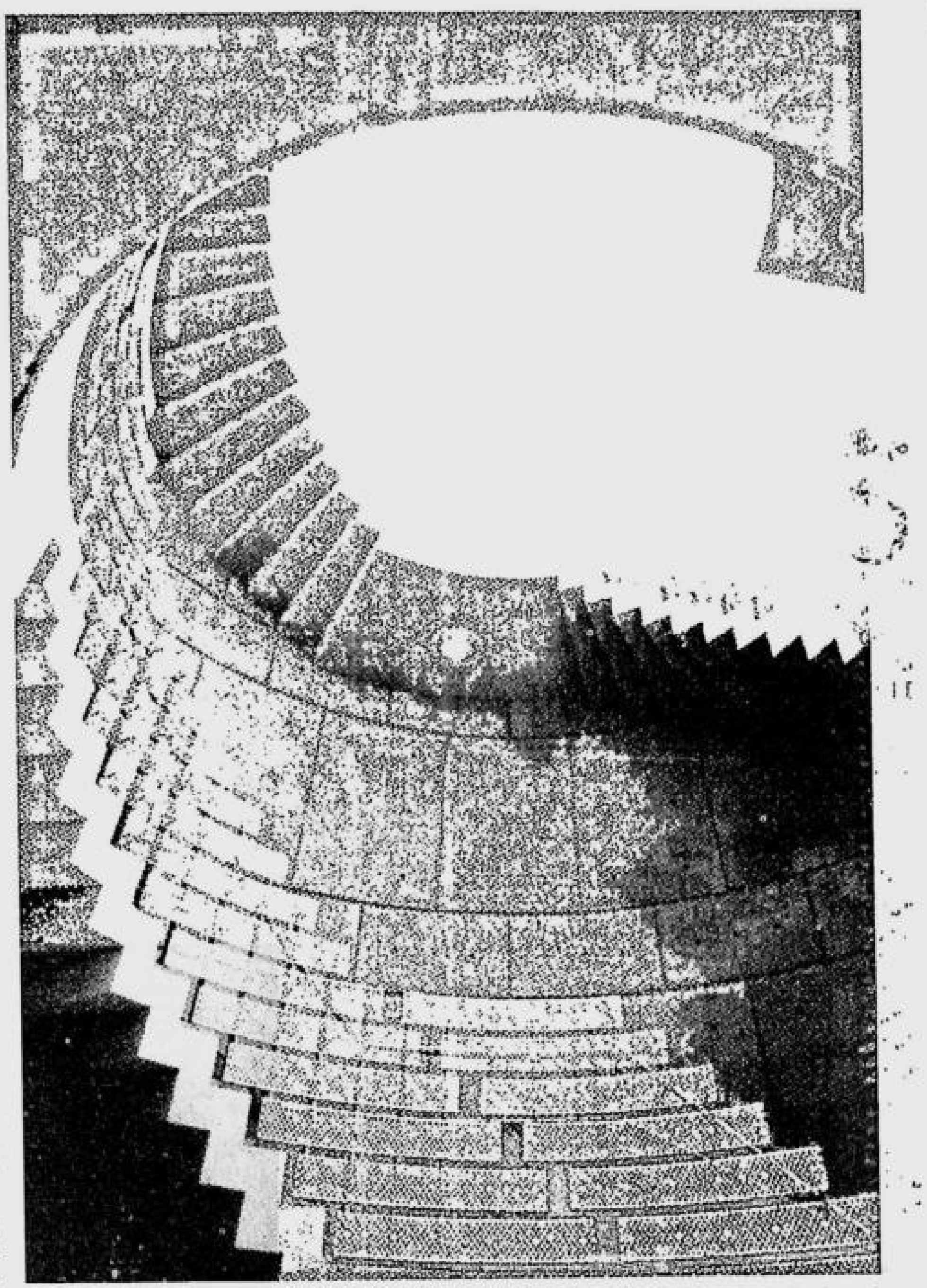
There are many disadvantages when interior staircases are placed in the inner core of a house or structure. First, without lighting, it is not safe. Second, it is not energy-efficient. Third, the staircase tends to be unkempt and badly maintained because people do not notice the gradual buildup of grime and dirt.

Single steps are the most dangerous. Since single step has no handrails, people are not made aware that the step exists. Consequently, they miss the step and fall.

For wooden stairs, many people still prefer to use banned wood species that are either difficult to find or very costly to purchase. This is not an environmentally sound practice since there are other varieties of hardwood available that can be alternatively used. If wood is to be used at all, thick slabs can be sliced into thinner planks terminated with a solid nosing and installed on a stable framework or concrete to get the desired effect of thick solid planks. This practice can considerably reduce the volume of wood used.

Staircases need not be a complicated feature of the house as long as the basic elements are in place like safety, comfort, looks and function.

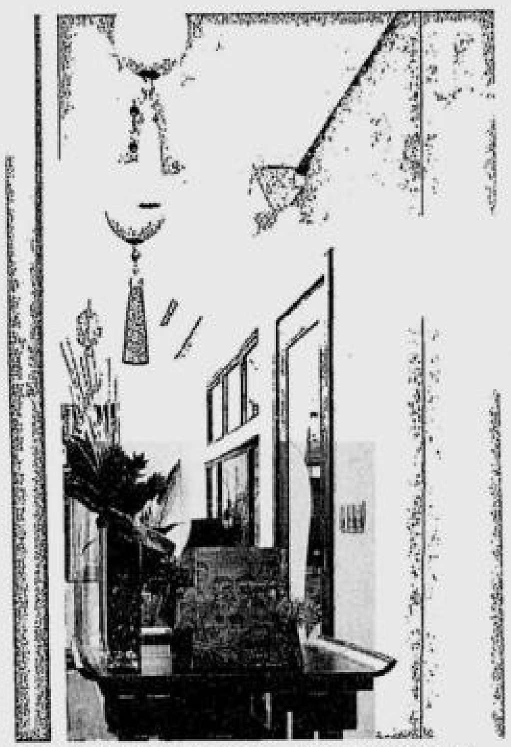
For comments or inquiries, e-mail amadodejesus@gmail.com.



HEALTHY stairs are an important component of green buildings. They are designed to convey people from one level to another in a safe, comfortable and efficient manner.

PAYETTE ASSOCIATES/ BRIAN VANDEN BRINK

The finest 1-bedroom unit at Manhattan Garden City



THE RECEIVING area features tassels and modern Chinese ornaments. A mirror easily doubles the space.

THE DINING area's garden-themed meal set is so inviting, you'd want to partake of a hearty meal right away.

THE BALCONY is perfect for private conversations.

LIFE IS ALL ABOUT CHOICES. IF YOU'RE one of the few who make that choice to get only the finest, most luxurious things in life, then you'll find your perfect home at Manhattan Garden City.

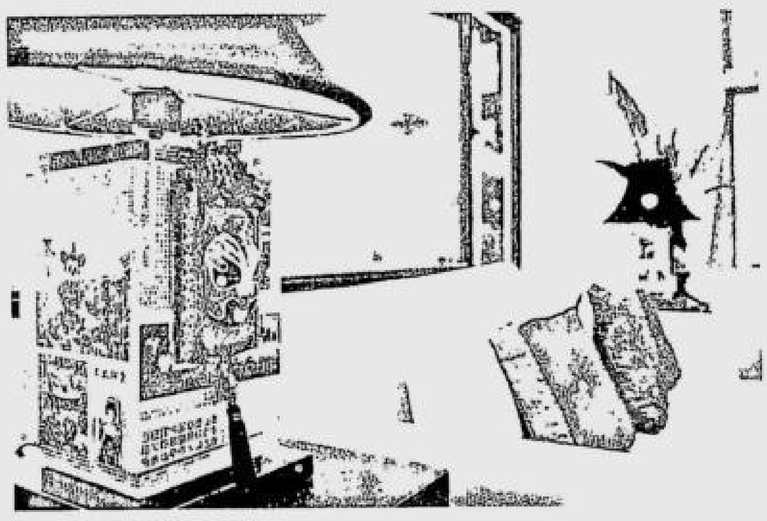
That home could be a stylish 1-bedroom unit within this new city. Its superior layout makes it one of the finest one-bedroom units available today, as can be viewed at the Manhattan Garden City showroom within Gateway Mall.

Trendy theme

The model unit was outfitted in a trendy Modern Asian theme. Upon entry, the receiving area makes you feel at home right away. It features tassels and modern Chinese ornaments, and a mirror easily doubles the space.

Once you step in further, you will appreciate how the open layout makes the living and dining areas look even larger. The white sofa with dark red and orange pillows looks so comfortable. Lamps and Chinese masks make good accent pieces on both sides of the sofa.

Then, your eyes gaze to the living room's main gem: the feature wall, with its art tiles and a trio of terra cotta soldiers guarding their main domain: that of a modern Chinese cabinetry. Surely, this space is the perfect spot to feature your precious art collection once you move in.



THE ONE-BEDROOM model unit was designed according to a modern Chinese motif.

TERRA cotta soldiers stand guard as wonderful accent pieces.

Over at the left, the dining area's garden-themed meal set is so inviting, you'd want to partake of a hearty meal right away. Flowers and leaf bowls catch your fancy. You imagine how dining here will always be a delight and the sweet conversations that you will exchange here with your loved ones.

And when you want to catch some air or have a private conversation, the balcony is just a step away. In here, a sun lounger and a pet station are the perfect accompaniments to viewing the city lights.

Main showcase

Then, you check out the main showcase: the master's bedroom. Its red motif will surely bring luck. The headboard was meticulously designed, as well as the pillows that call to mind a stunning Chinese maiden, which sums up the unit's design: it's a true Asian beauty. A yellow umbrella further hints of the artistry of this Asian-themed haven.

At 53.5 square meters, this one-bedroom unit definitely offers a lot of space. Plus, with Homelite, the revolutionary offering from leading developer Megaworld Corp. and Security Bank, yuppies and starting families can acquire this stylish one-bedroom unit for only P27,717 monthly.

Transit-oriented dev't

After all, what more can your heart desire? The best features that make Manhattan in New York City an enviable residential haven inspired this new city on the rise. Its modern residential towers take their design cue from Manhattan's world-famous, breathtaking skyline. Over there, you can take a walk, board the subway, or take a cab to get to your destination fast. Over here, Manhattan Garden City is a true transit-oriented development. It is the first and only project in the country today that offers connection to two main transit systems: the LRT2 and MRT3.

Better make that choice soon by checking out the finest one-bedroom unit. Just visit the Manhattan Garden City showroom at the third level of Gateway Mall. Or call 810-3333 or e-mail inquire@themanhattangardencity.com for a viewing appointment.

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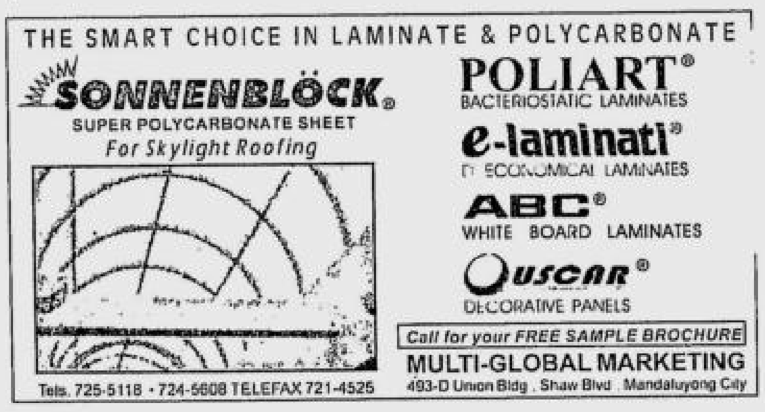

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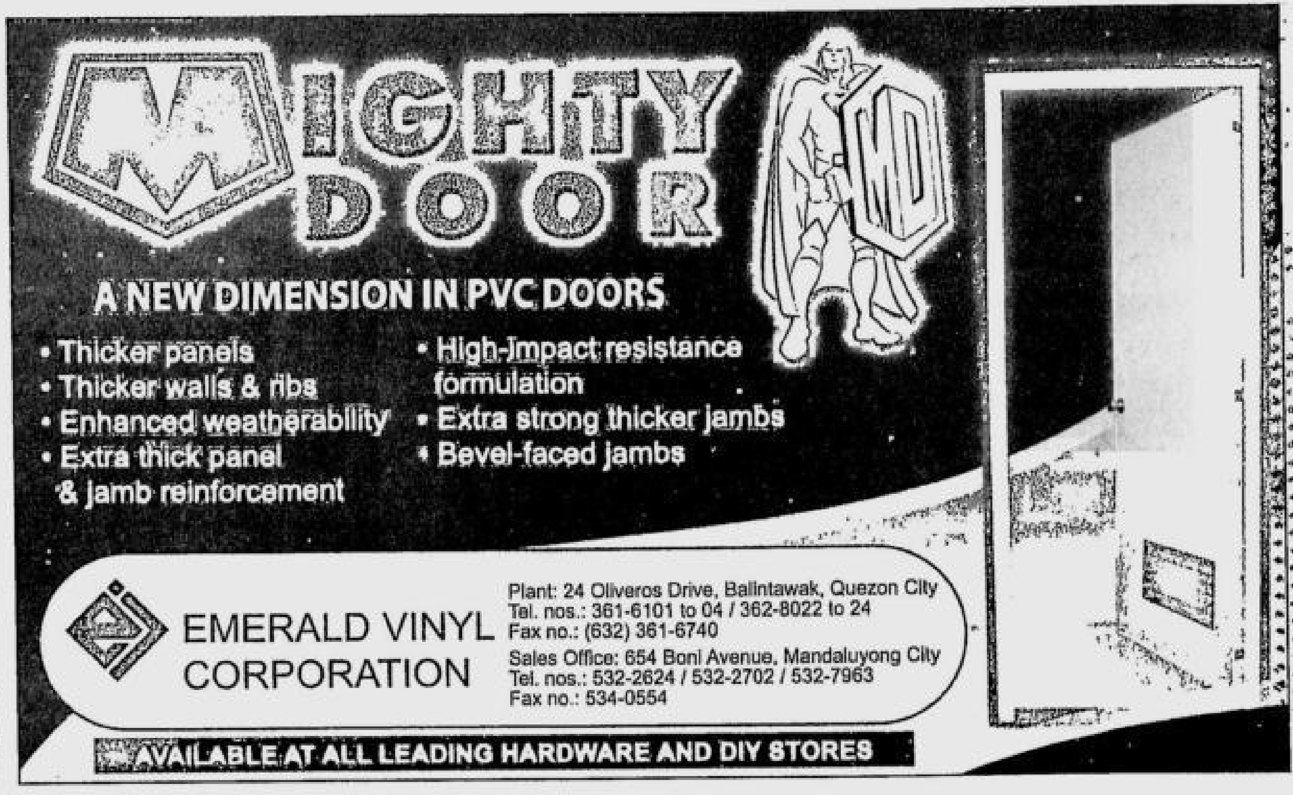

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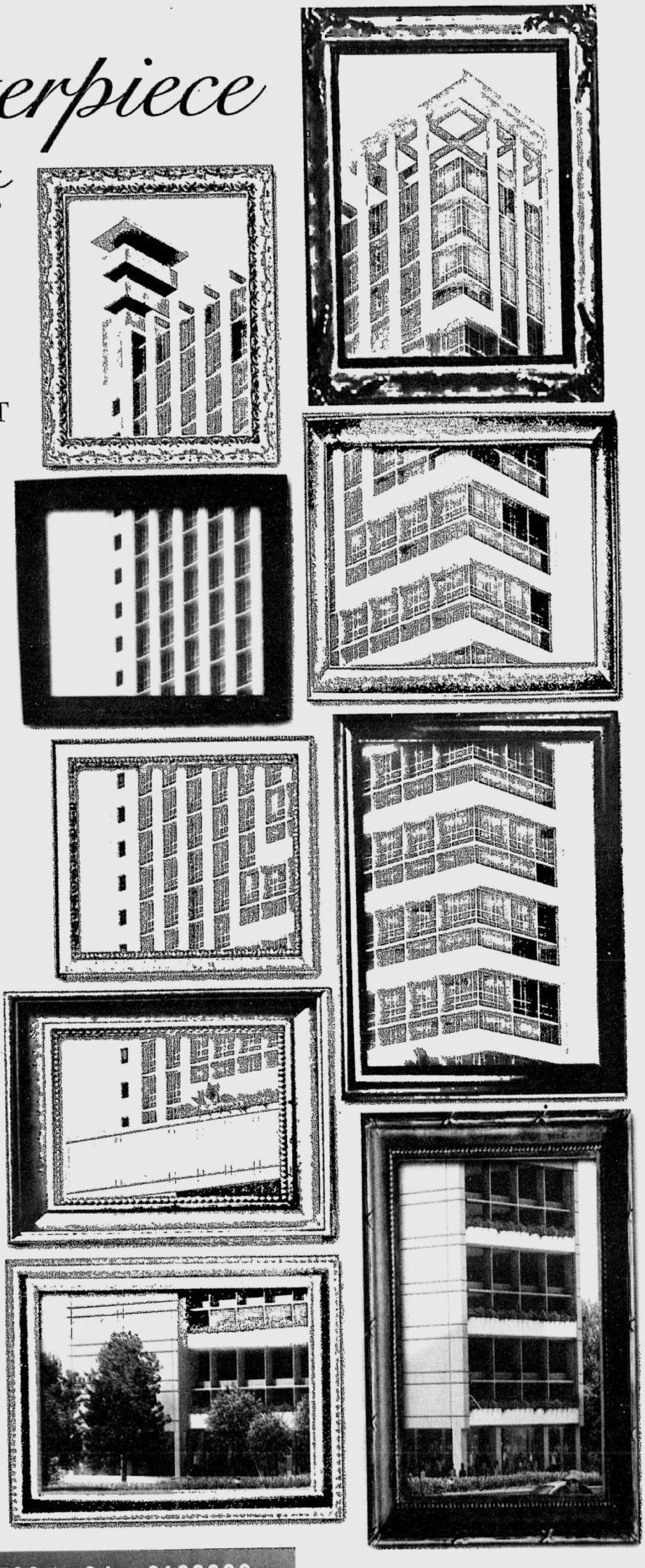

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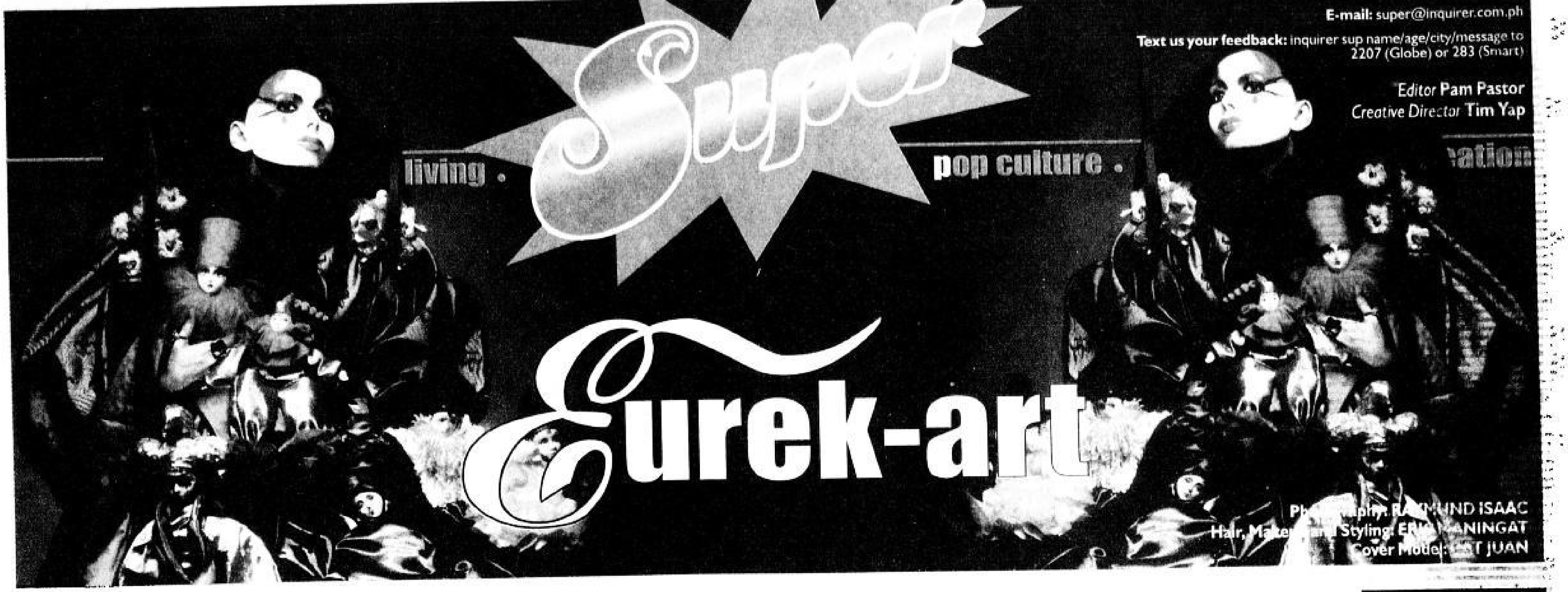

Ph aphy: RA UND ISAAC
Hair, Make and Styling: ER ANINGAT
Cover Model: T JUAN

24/7

Paolo R. Reyes
Janine Cuenca-Dario

A Night in Neverland

AS CHILDREN GO ABOUT THE BEWILdering business of growing up, they often forget a magical maxim from their favorite fairy tale: Happy thoughts can make you fly.

As we celebrate the arrival of a brand new year, it might be a good idea to reclaim the lost lessons of our childhood. This month, the Hong Kong-based ABA Productions flies in the smash-hit musical "Peter Pan," J.M. Barrie's beloved tale of lost boys, Indian maidens, and pirate rogues.

The international theater production—which boasts a talented cast from the UK, Australia, and the US—will be staged at the CCP from Jan. 12 to Feb. 4.

Proceeds from the production will be used to fund the flagship projects of Children's Hour, a grant-giving organization committed to the welfare of marginalized Filipino children. In the words of Peter himself, it's going to be "an awfully big adventure." Call 891-9999, 752-1180, or visit FlyPeterPan.com.

Three Kings cometh

On Sunday, Jan. 7, the Casino Español de Manila [855 T.M. Kalaw St., Ermita, Manila] celebrates the Feast of the Three Kings. From 3 p.m. onwards, children of all ages are invited to welcome Gaspar, Balthazar and Melchor as they arrive on horseback bearing candies, and other treats. The club has lined up a fun-filled program of activities for kids while their parents can feast on authentic Spanish *tapas* or shop in a mini-bazaar. Call 525-7604.

Other Super! 24/7 events:

Jan. 6, Saturday

Up Dharma Down, Bagetsafonik & Analog at Saguijo; Lounge-O-Rama w/ Soundsgood DJs at Embassy Cuisine; DJ Kevin Ruiz at Mezze; House Nation at Capone's; Rouge: Lounge in Color at M Café; DJs Jon Herrera & Tolo Bote at Temple; Sleepless w/ DJ Martin Pulgar at Embassy Club; Bayang Barrios & Cooky Chua at Conspiracy

Jan. 7, Sunday

A Night of Brass Music: UST Brass Quintet at the Shangri-La Plaza Grand Atrium; Jazz Sunday Brunch w/ Vince Lahorra at M Café ; Champagne Buffet Lunch at Paseo Uno

Jan. 8, Monday

Happy Mondays hosted by Borgy Manotoc at Embassy Cuisine; I Don't Like Mondays! w/ DJ RO at Gweilos Makati; Chemical Underground w/ Kishore at Absinth

Jan. 9, Tuesday

Sino Sikat?, Cosmic Love, Pinoy Stories & Itchyworms at Saguijo; Cuisine Royale w/ DJ Manolet Dario at Embassy Cuisine; Sparkle w/ DJs Erwin Edralin & Patch at Absinth; Joey Ayala at Conspiracy

Jan. 10, Wednesday

Look Models Night at Embassy Cuisine; DJs Mars Miranda & Johnyverse at Embassy Club; Skyy High at Vida Malate; Mishmash w/ DJs Brando Umali & Red-I at Absinth; Stereo Therapy at Embassy VIP Room; Willy Wanka's Music Factory at Gweilos Makati; DJ Kimozave & Chrismyx at Prince of Jaipur

Jan. 11, Thursday

Jammin' Reggae w/ Brownman Revival at Conspiracy; Pinikpikan, Valve-8 & Rinka at Saguijo; The Lettermen: Live! at Crowne Plaza Hotel

Jan. 12, Friday

Flammable Fridays w/ DJ Mau Torres at Mezze; DJ Owens Sun at Embassy Club; Soul Shine w/ DJ Marie Garcia at Embassy Cuisine

Schedules may change without prior notice. For more info, text 24/7 GIGS to 2851 (Globe) and 2951 (Smart). Log on to mag24-7.com or pick up your free copy of 24/7 NOCTURNAL NAVIGATOR at bars and restaurants around the city. Submit your schedules before Tuesday to events@mag24-7.com & mag24_7@yahoo.com.

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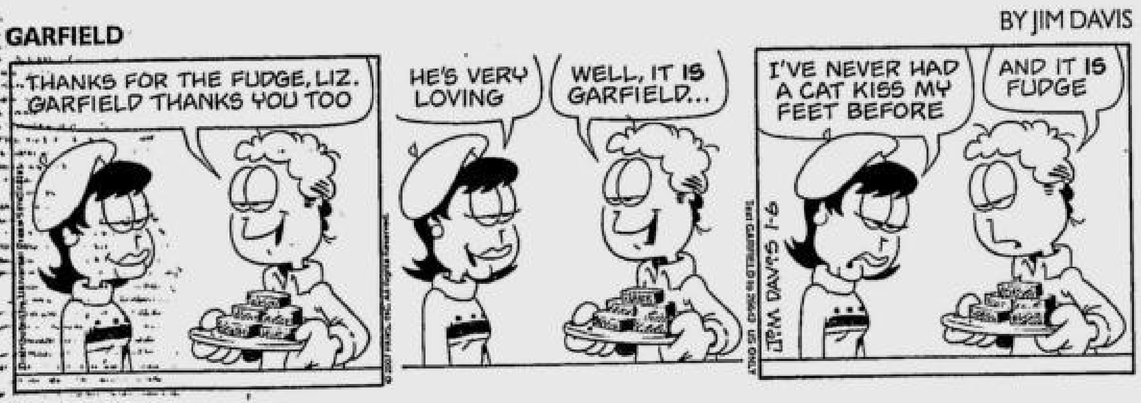
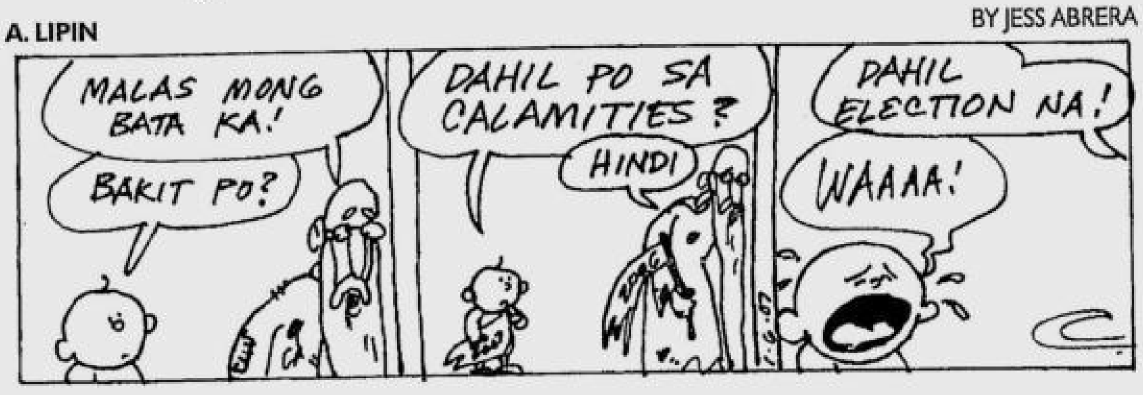
GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS


THANKS FOR THE FUDGE, LIZ. GARFIELD THANKS YOU TOO
HE'S VERY LOVING
WELL, IT IS GARFIELD...
I'VE NEVER HAD A CAT KISS MY FEET BEFORE
AND IT IS FUDGE
JPM DAVIS 1-6

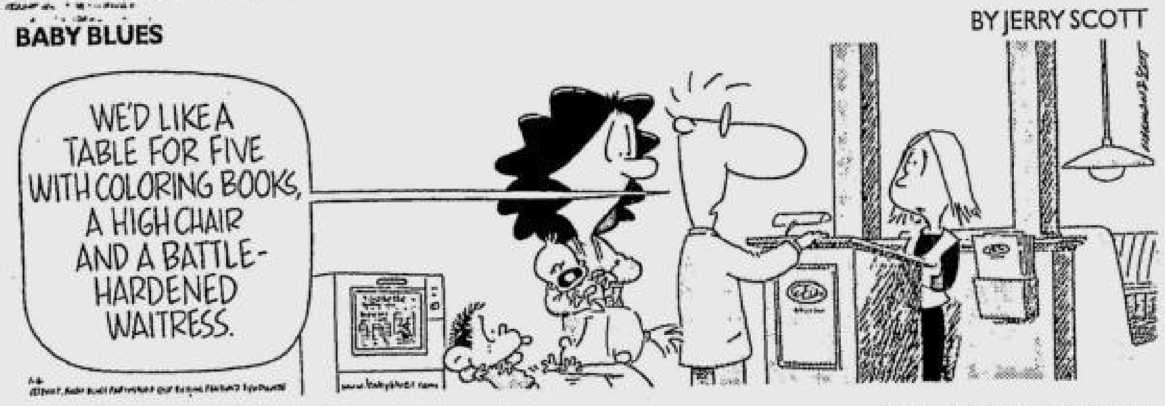
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


MALAS MONG BATA KA!
BAKIT PO?
DAHIL PO SA CALAMITIES ?
HINDI
DAHIL ELECTION NA!
WAAAA!

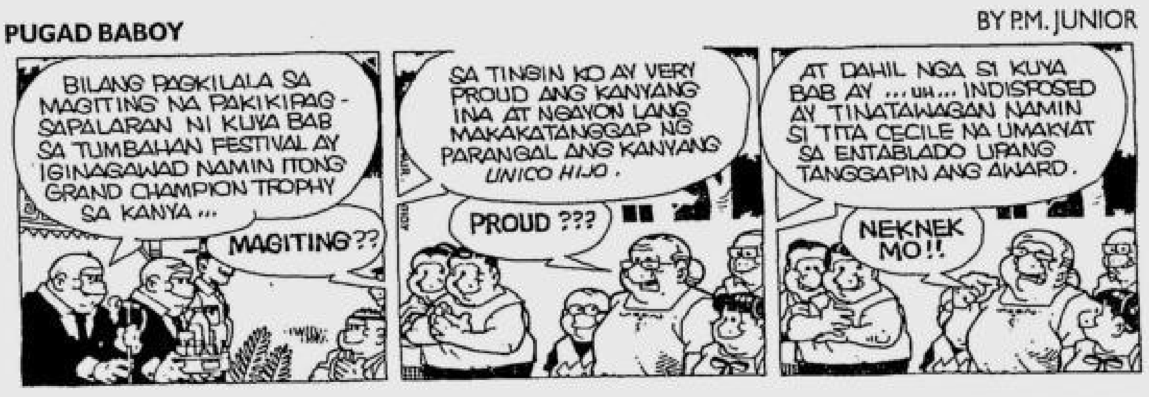
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


WE'D LIKE A TABLE FOR FIVE WITH COLORING BOOKS, A HIGH CHAIR AND A BATTLE-HARDENED WAITRESS.

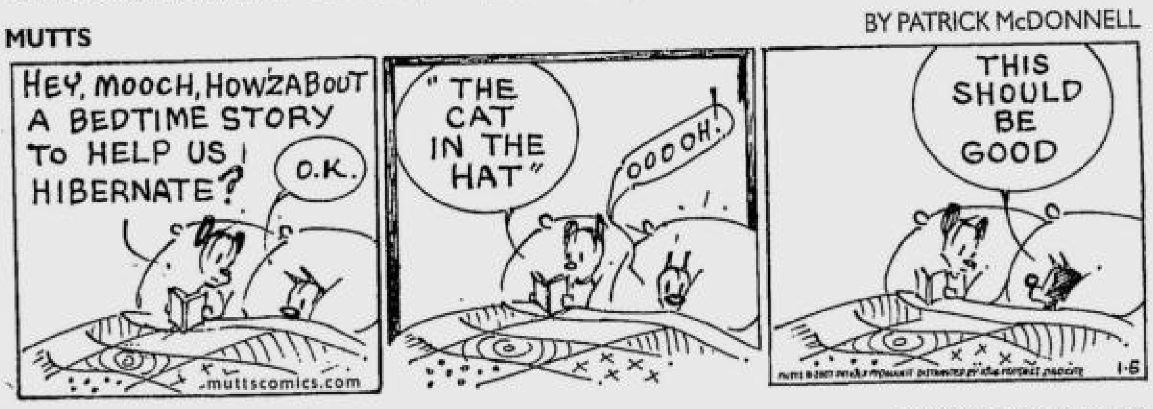
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


BILANG PAGKILALA SA MAGITING NA PAKIKIPAG-SAPALARAN NI KUYA BAB SA TUMBAHAN FESTIVAL AY IGINAGAWAD NAMIN ITONG GRAND CHAMPION TROPHY SA KANYA...
MAGITING??
SA TINGIN KO AY VERY PROUD ANG KANYANG INA AT NGAYON LANG MAKAKATANGGAP NG PARANGAL ANG KANYANG UNICO HIJO.
PROUD ???
AT DAHIL NGA SI KUYA BAB AY ... UH... INDISPOSED AY TINATAWAGAN NAMIN SI TITA CECILE NA UMAKYAT SA ENTABLADO UPANG TANGGAPIN ANG AWARD.
NEKNEK MO!!

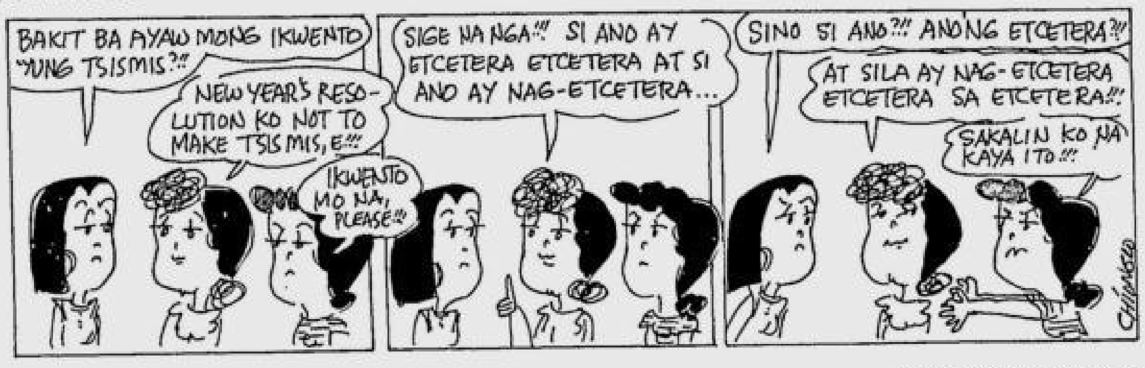
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


HEY, MOOCH, HOWZABOUT A BEDTIME STORY TO HELP US HIBERNATE?
O.K.
"THE CAT IN THE HAT"
OOOOH!
THIS SHOULD BE GOOD
muttscomics.com
1-6

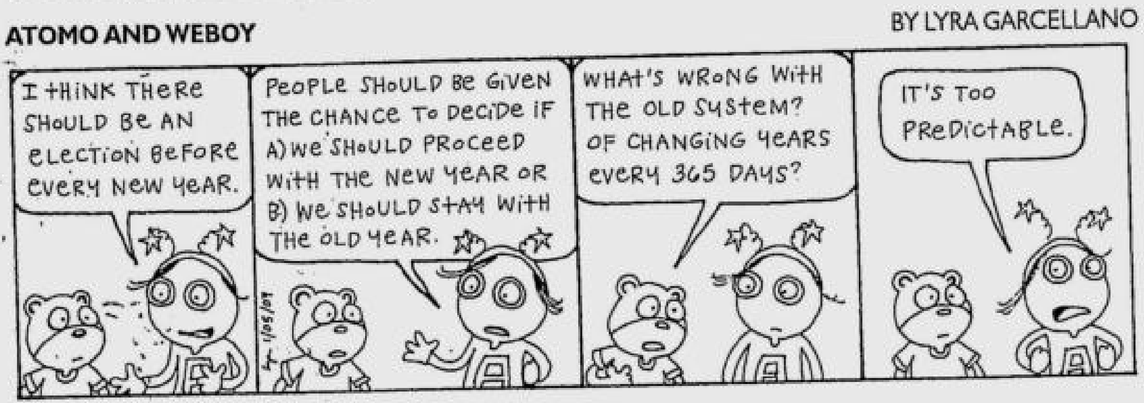
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


BAKIT BA AYAW MONG IKWENTO 'YUNG TSISMIS?!!
NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION KO NOT TO MAKE TSISMIS, E!!!
IKWENTO MO NA, PLEASE!!!
SIGE NA NGA!!! SI ANO AY ETCETERA ETCETERA AT SI ANO AY NAG-ETCETERA...
SINO SI ANO?!! ANO'NG ETCETERA?!!
AT SILA AY NAG-ETCETERA ETCETERA SA ETCETERA!!!
SAKALIN KO NA KAYA ITO!!!

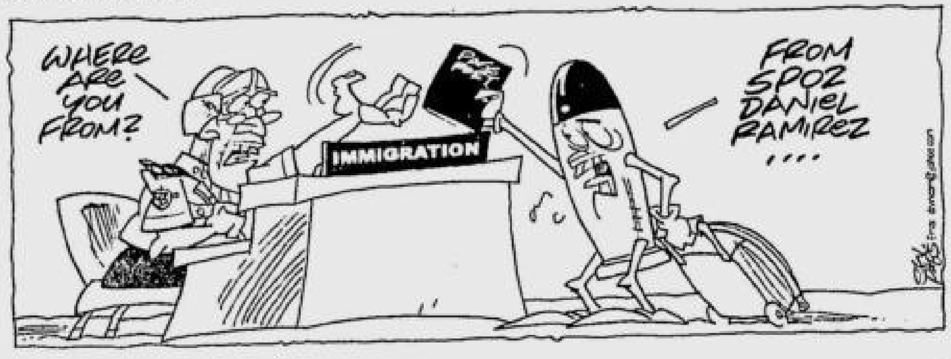
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


I THINK THERE SHOULD BE AN ELECTION BEFORE EVERY NEW YEAR.
PEOPLE SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO DECIDE IF A) WE SHOULD PROCEED WITH THE NEW YEAR OR B) WE SHOULD STAY WITH THE OLD YEAR.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE OLD SYSTEM? OF CHANGING YEARS EVERY 365 DAYS?
IT'S TOO PREDICTABLE.

DIVINE COMEDY

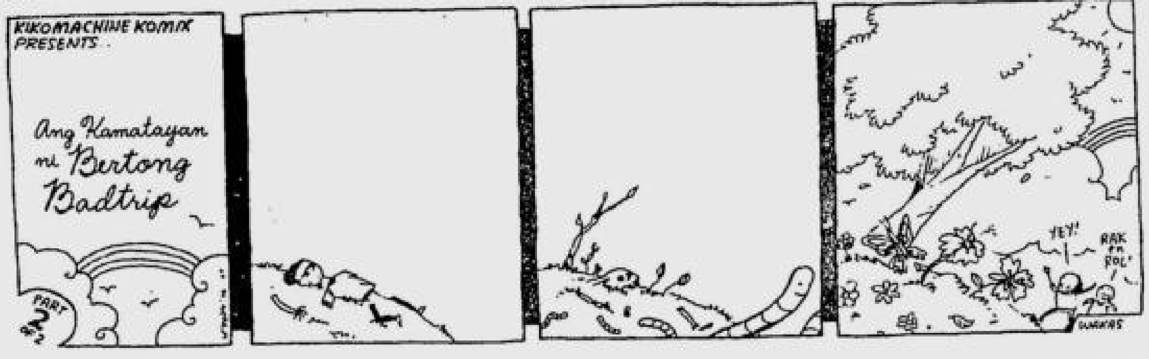
BY STEVEN PABALINAS


WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
IMMIGRATION
FROM SPOZ DANIEL RAMIREZ ....

ANG PATULOY NA PAKIKIPAG-SAPALARAN NG LIGAW NA BALA

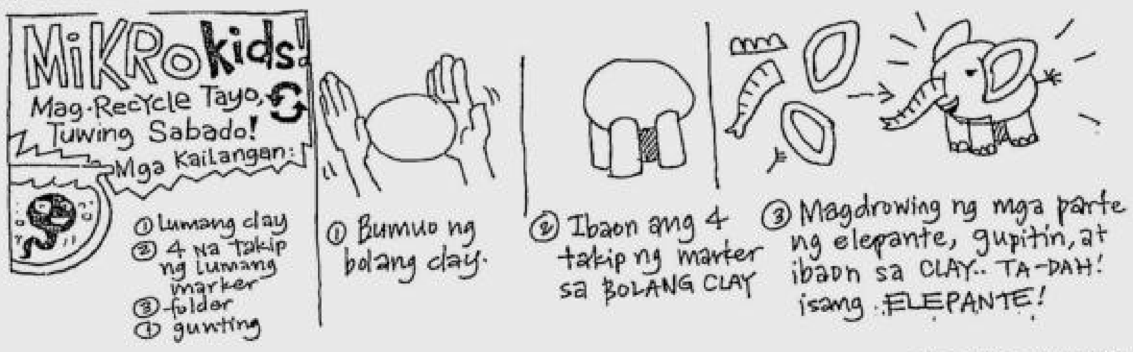
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


KIKOMACHINE KOMIX PRESENTS
Ang Kamatayan ni Bertong Badtrip
PART 2
YEY!
RAK EN ROL!
WAKAS

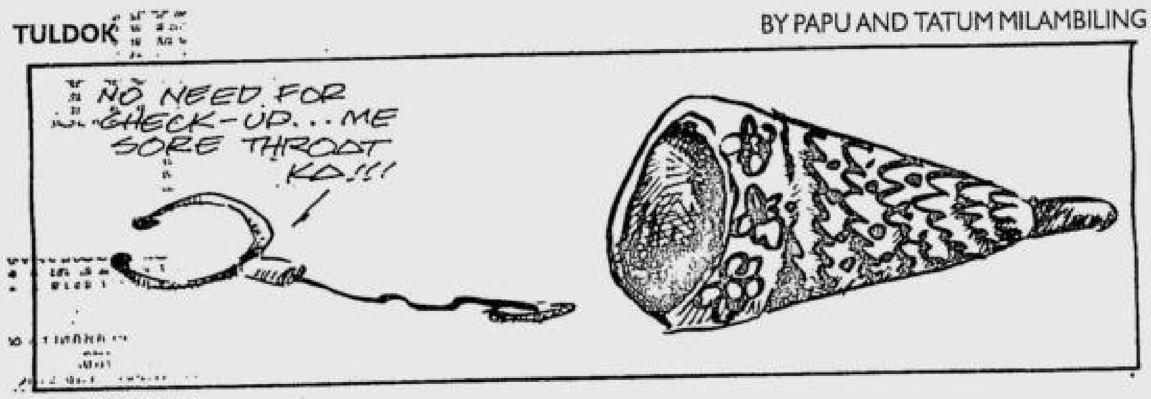
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


MiKRoKids!
Mag-Recycle Tayo, Tuwing Sabado!
Mga Kailangan:
① Lumang clay
② 4 na takip ng lumang marker
③ folder
④ gunting
① Bumuo ng bolang clay.
② Ibaon ang 4 takip ng marker sa BOLANG CLAY
③ Magdrowing ng mga parte ng elepante, gupitin, at ibaon sa CLAY.. TA-DAH! isang ELEPANTE!

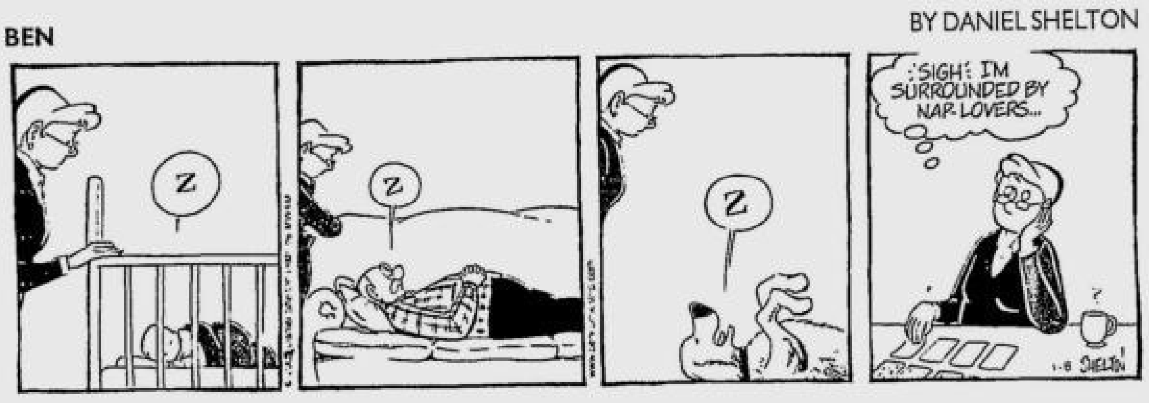
TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING

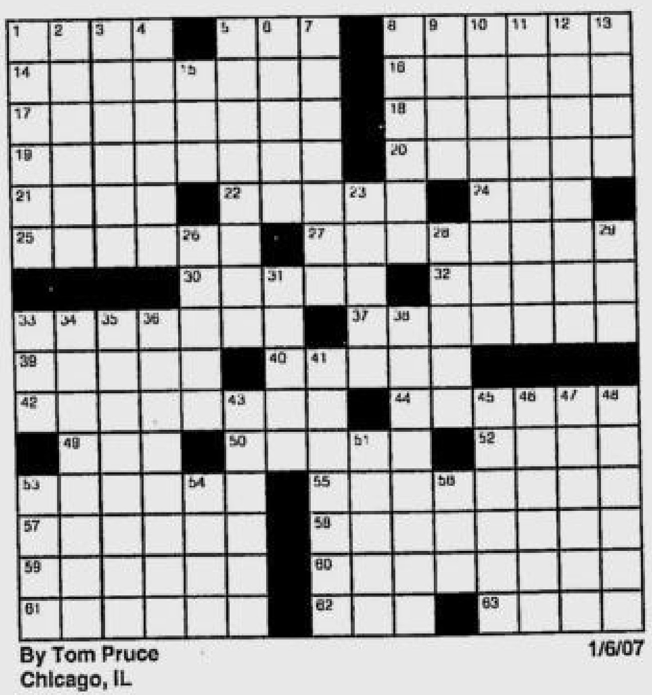

NO NEED FOR CHECK-UP... ME SORE THROOT KA!!!

BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


Z
Z
Z
SIGH: I'M SURROUNDED BY NAP LOVERS...
1-6 SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Tom Pruce
Chicago, IL

1/6/07

ACROSS

1 Sports fig.
5 Weak in numbers
8 Hors d'oeuvre
14 Fancy name for a timepiece
16 Sandy or Roberto of baseball
17 Ornate wardrobes
18 Sage by another name
19 Superlatively substantial
20 Jeweled coronets
21 River of Tuscany
22 Engraved pillar
24 Vietnamese holiday
25 Knotty, as roots
27 Floral-shaped garnishes
30 Reeves of "My Own Private Idaho"
32 With obvious moisture
33 Liv of "Persona"
37 Basque or Spaniard
39 Asian capital
40 Javelin or harpoon
42 Bad one
44 Hitchcock film
49 Oft-used abbr.
50 Sheep call
52 Mumford or Busby
53 Rocky ridges
55 Uncorrupted
57 Mineral used in paint
58 Losers
59 Go-betweens
60 Greek wines
61 Marsh grasses
62 19th letter
63 Turkish bigwig

DOWN

1 Medicine man
2 Bullfighter
3 Assante or Hammer
4 Excessively affected
5 Predicted
6 Give off
7 Type of omelet or saddle
8 Bills of fare
9 Jai follower?
10 Regardless of
11 Cupids
12 Slender cigar
13 Period pieces?
15 Half of CIV
23 Comic Anderson
26 Scandinavian poet
28 Nightstand pitchers
29 Equivalent wd.
31 Photographer Adams
33 Purpose
34 Positional advantage
35 Hung around
36 Penalizing with a fine
38 Protestant sect members
41 Get ready
43 Preoccupy
45 White powder used in incandescent gas
46 __ Kai-shek
47 "__ and Her Sisters"
48 Black Sea port
51 City on the Rhone River delta
53 Arab outer garments
54 Back of a kitchen?
56 Distress signal

Friday's Puzzle Solved

E	L	B	O	W	■	S	M	I	T	S	■	S	P	A
B	A	M	B	I	■	P	A	N	E	L	■	H	A	M
B	O	W	E	N	■	I	L	O	N	A	■	A	T	A
■	■	■	S	K	I	N	A	N	D	B	O	N	E	S
A	R	R	E	S	T	E	R	■	■	■	H	A	N	S
D	U	N	■	■	S	L	I	M	C	H	A	N	C	E
D	E	A	L	S	■	■	A	S	H	T	R	A	Y	S
■	■	■	E	T	A	L	■	S	E	T	A	■	■	■
K	E	F	A	U	V	E	R	■	■	P	S	H	A	W
T	H	I	N	N	E	D	O	U	T	■	■	A	G	A
O	R	D	O	■	■	■	S	N	A	P	P	I	E	R
S	L	E	N	D	E	R	I	Z	E	R	S	■	■	■
L	I	L	■	I	R	A	N	I	■	O	A	T	E	R
I	C	I	■	S	T	R	E	P	■	B	L	A	R	E
N	H	S	■	H	E	E	D	S	■	E	M	B	E	D

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1/6/07

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You have a fine mind. You love to explore and prove all kinds of truths. Your search includes sophisticated, abstract ideas as well as practical realities. You have a strong, spiritual side. You're also courageous in the face of danger. Set aside time in the year ahead to study something important. (You will value this.)
Birthdate of: Nigella Lawson, TV cook; E.L. Doctorow, author; Rowan Atkinson, comedian/actor.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): You might feel increased burdens or obligations related to children today. You definitely feel serious about your responsibilities with someone, perhaps a romantic partner. (This is good.)

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): This is the perfect day to tackle practical chores at home. Talk to family members about making long-range improvements to where you live.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): It's easy to fall into worry mode today. That's because you're tuned in to serious matters and whatever you perceive as your duty at this time. Make a list.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): If shopping today, you will buy only practical, long-lasting things. You're not in the mood to part with your hard-earned money for something frivolous.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Today the Moon lines up with stern Saturn in your sign. This makes you feel cautious and very careful about something. You feel the need to hedge your bets.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): You're ready to apply yourself to routine, boring tasks today. You have the concentration and the motivation to get the job done. You're taking a basic, no-frills approach to life.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Someone older or more experienced (and probably a female) in your life has some advice for you today. You might as well listen to see if it is of any benefit. (You never know.)

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Duties and obligations are your main concerns today. Your boss or a parent might expect more from you. Just do what you can. Life is short (and fat).

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Discussions about religion or politics might be quite serious today. Travel plans or matters related to school could be delayed. Don't be discouraged by this.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): This is a poor day to ask for a mortgage or a loan or to petition anyone for help. People are playing their cards close to their chest.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Discussions with partners will be about serious subjects today. That's just what's happening in the stars. Listen with full attention. Others want to be taken seriously today.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Your duties at work feel like they're important today. This is why you're willing to work hard to make everything orderly and efficient. You want things to run smoothly and efficiently.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

	1			6		5	2	
		5						
			3		4			
2		9				4		
		4		3		7		
		8				3		9
			9		6			
						6		
	5	2		7			3	

Difficulty Level ★★★★ 1/06

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

7	4	3	5	1	6	9	8	2
5	6	8	3	9	2	7	4	1
9	1	2	8	7	4	3	6	5
6	8	9	1	3	5	2	7	4
1	2	4	7	6	9	8	5	3
3	7	5	4	2	8	6	1	9
8	9	1	2	4	7	5	3	6
4	5	6	9	8	3	1	2	7
2	3	7	6	5	1	4	9	8

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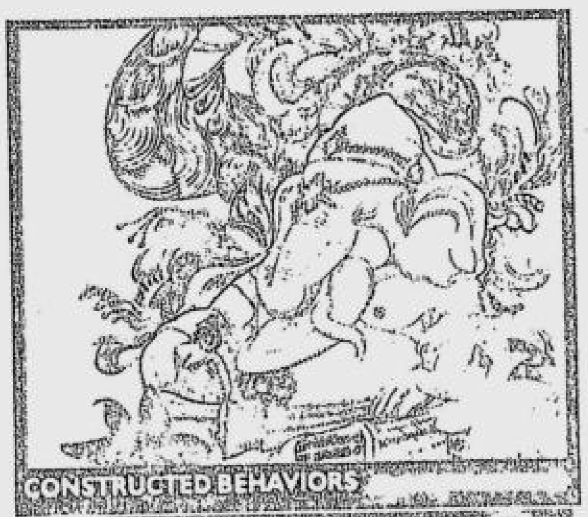
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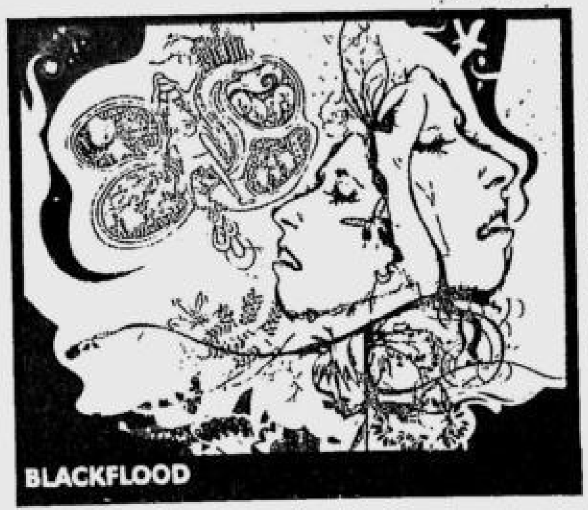
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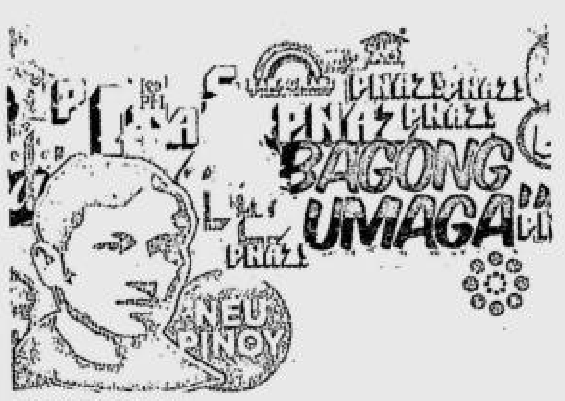
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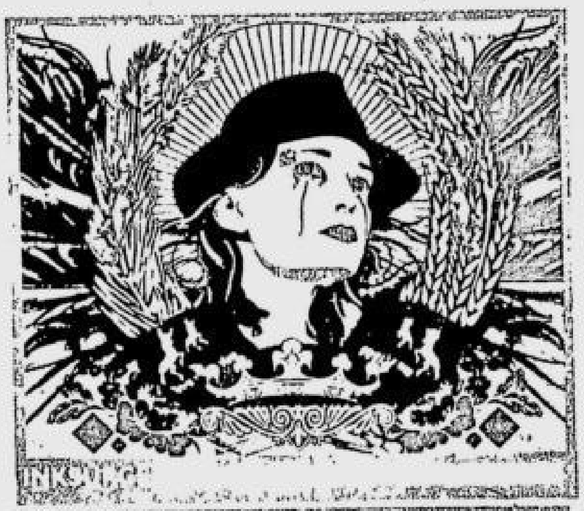
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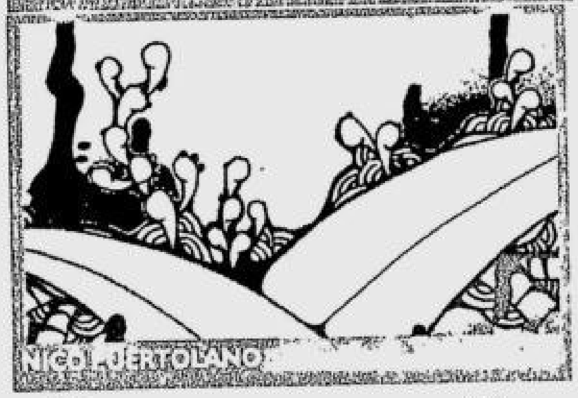
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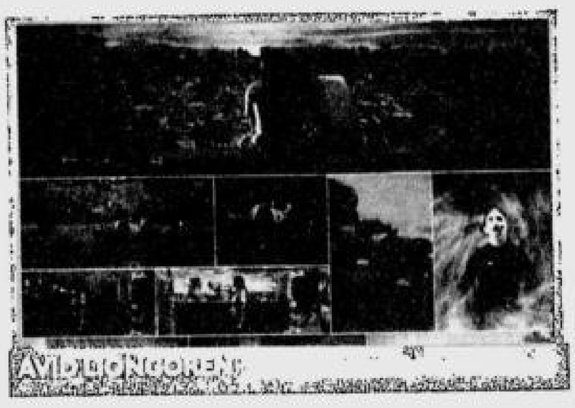
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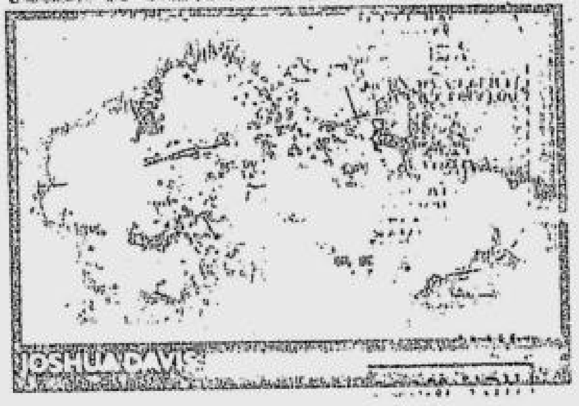

JOSHUA DAVIS

Superheroes

of the Photoshop generation

By David Millan

Super! has always been a champion of local artists. We believe in giving them space, the venue and the chance to unleash their creativity and to let everyone else bask in their explosion of colors.

And so when we heard about Graphika Manila, we were thrilled.

It's good to know that this generation of artists is growing at a crazy speed. Thanks to technology, talent and a lot of imagination, the Photoshop generation is forming a name of its own.

The possibilities of the magic that is Photoshop are endless. A creative mind, an eye for detail, and a little swish of the hand may be all you need to be the next big thing in graphic design.

A lot of us are giddy amateurs but there are countless graphic designers and artists who have been doing it for years now—and have been perfecting their craft ever since.

Using different kinds of programs for graphic design, they've created a new breed of artwork that can put Picasso to shame.

Graphic design has taken over. It's everywhere—from the world wide web to the billboards in Edsa and the shirt the person beside you is wearing.

With this in mind, Activenture's main man Alfie Sy, organized Graphika Manila—the very first intenational multi-media design conference in the country. It gathered professionals, students and members of the media in a visual festival that featured top local and international design artists as speakers.

Headlining the group of speakers was Joshua Davis, winner of the 2001 Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica (the Oscars of International Digital Art and Design). His presentation was mind-blowing. He showed samples of his award-winning works for clients including BMW Z4 and recently, the MotoKRZR.

MK12, a multi-awarded motion design specialists, presented their works that showcased their pop-heavy visual style. One of their creations is Coca-Cola's latest campaign—yes, the bottle that explodes with color.

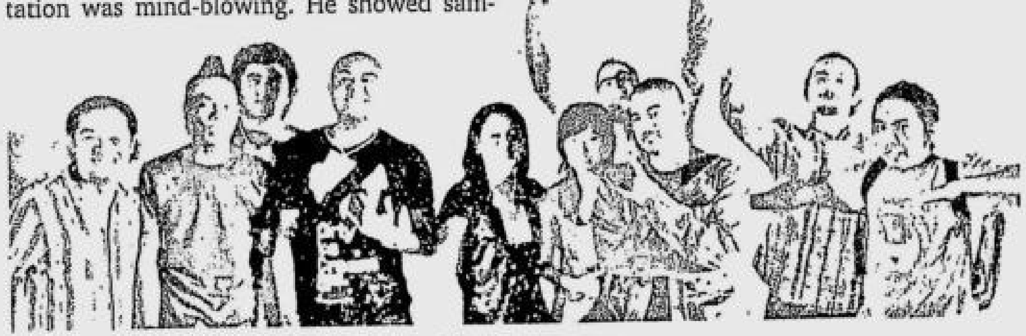
Avid Liongoren's presentation was possibly the most engaging segment in the event. He took newbie designers and seasoned artists throughout the whole process of creating video projects. Some of his works are music videos from top rock acts like Rivermaya, Kitchie Nadal and Kamikazee.

Collaboration, which was one of the central themes of the whole conference, was best shown by Drew Europeo and Blackflood. Both have collaborated with different artists to create a fresh new look on designs. One perfect example of a collaborations is a compilation of black and white artworks created by Black Flood with Aram Beheshti. The book will hit major bookstores by January next year.

I am Super! Awardee Team Manila presented Branding Philippines, a collection of their best creative work that features their popularized renditions of Pinoy icons like Rizal, streetwalk vendors, the jeepney and more. The dynamic duo of Jowee Alviar and Mon Punzalan have produced groundbreaking designs and, with their dose of coolness and artistry, have helped give birth to a new era of Pinoy nationalism. They're really Super!

Other speakers were Nico Puertollano, Rex Advincula and Joyce Tai of Inksurge.

The event was a big step for graphic design in the country. And we're sure that next year, we'll witness an even bigger one.


ART REPUBLIC. The team of Graphika Manila

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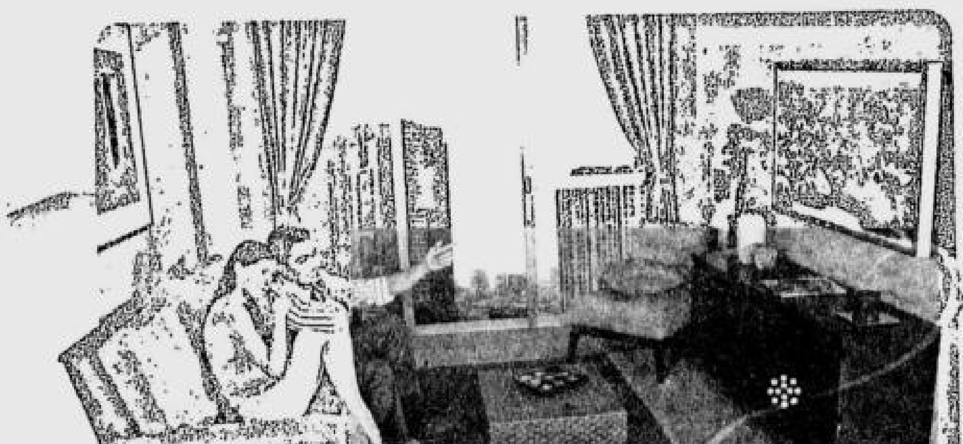

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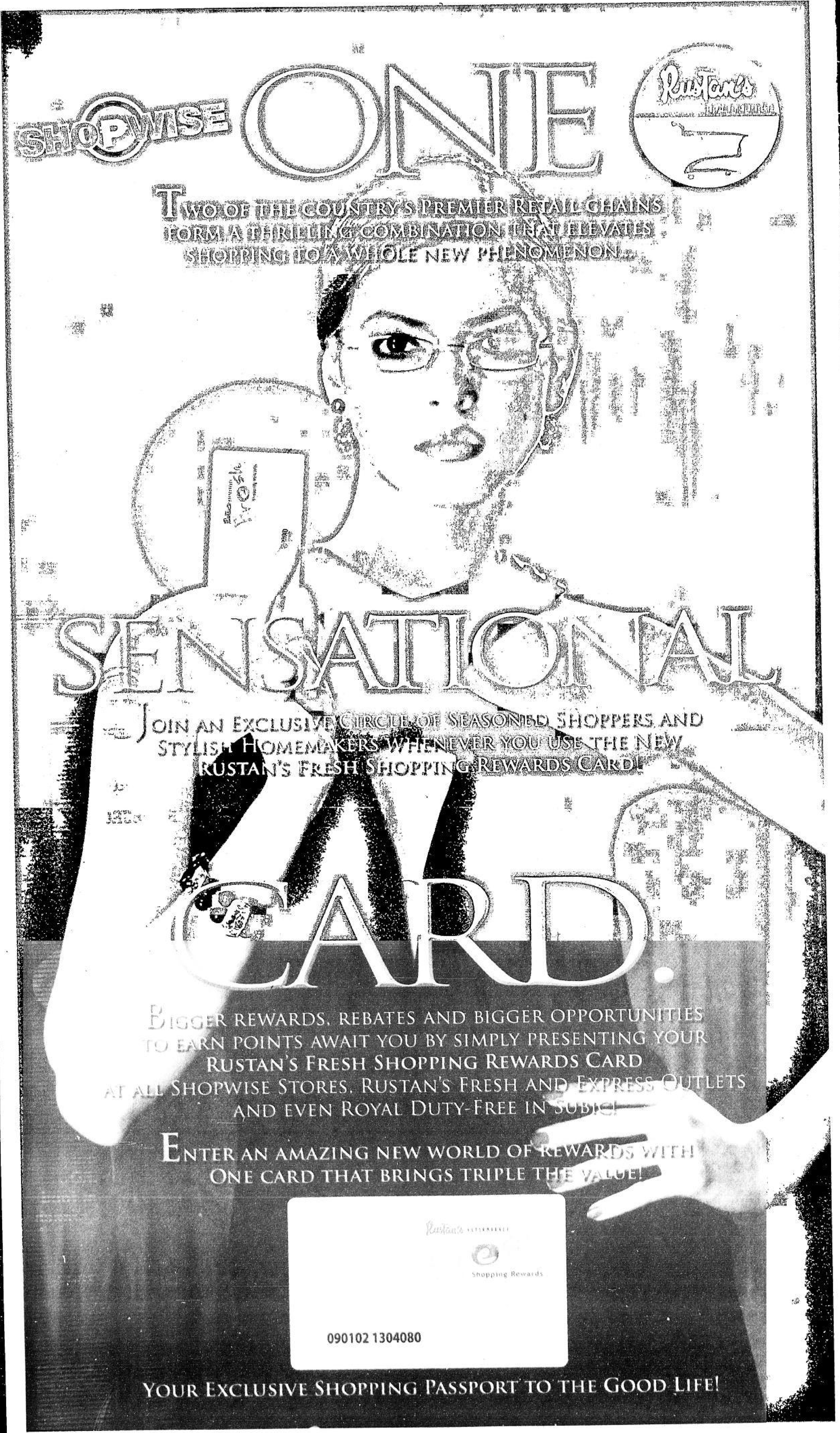

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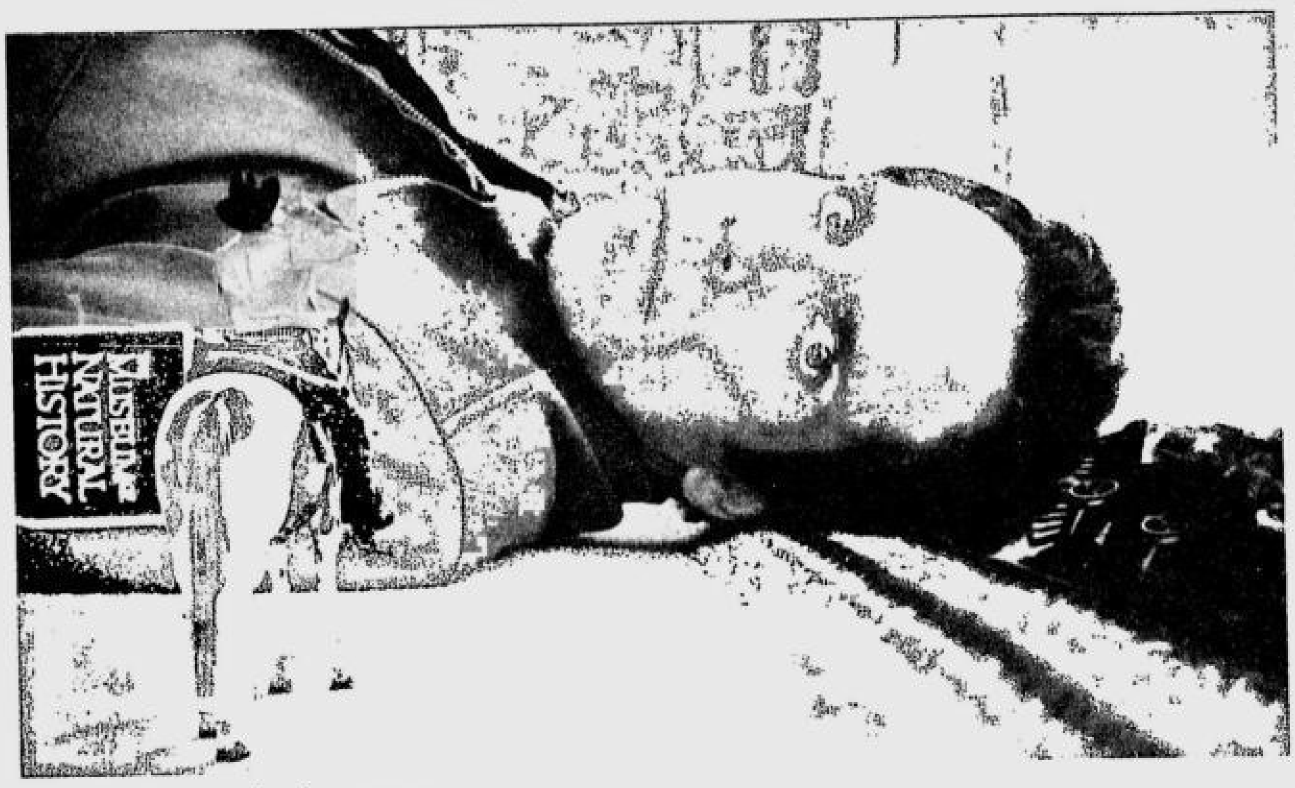

STILLER. "Fun party" at the museum.

Sequels, crowd-pleasers boost new film year

By Nestor U. Torre

DESPITE SOME exceptional films, 2006 wasn't one of the current decade's most productive years. So, film buffs are hoping that 2007 will turn out to be a more significant cinematic year.

Do they have reasons for being optimistic? In the commercial, mainstream sense, yes. This early, Hollywood analysts are counting their prospective billions as they beamingly survey the delicious box-office prospects of a number of much-anticipated sequels that bid fair to top the tills.

RADCLIFFE. Reprises role of teenage wizard in "Order of the Phoenix."

Blockbusters

The most eagerly anticipated sequel is **"Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End,"** for the simple reason that the hit film franchise's first two installments were such huge blockbusters.

"Spider-Man 3" is also generating a lot of buzz, particularly

SEQUELS/ D2

Politicians and artists don't mix

By Behn Cervantes

THE METRO MANILA FILM Festival is once again the center of a major tempest. So, what else is new? For years now, the film fest has become a magnet for controversies.

This happens when politicians think they know better than the film artists themselves.

Cooperation

What's worse is when politicians (who think they're also artistic) get the cooperation of politically inclined industry personalities. This is a terrible combination.

Wannabe politician-actors who have seen better days latch onto people who can help them secure a political future.

I have long complained about the quality of MMFF movies. Entries are not produced with the real intent of a film fest in mind. Producers have a whole year to prepare their entries, but they continue to deliver their movies just in the nick of time to beat the deadline.

Entries

In the '70s, the Manila Film Festival demonstrated what it was to have a real film fest. In 1976 alone, the festival had some superior entries like "Minsa'y Isang Gamu-gamo" and "Insiang."

However, since those classics were up against commercial entries that starred undisputed box-office draws like Dolphy, Fernando Poe Jr. and Joseph Estrada, they did poorly at the box office.

Of course, producers quickly decided to go even more commercial. One producer even declared, "*Sa inyo na ang mga award. Sa amin ang* box office!"

Profit

Since most producers focus on profit, very few dare produce festival-quality films. And because horror and fantasy movies have a following, a franchise in these genres has already come up with seven sequels!

Ditto for "Mano Po," Lily Monteverde's productions about Chinoy life. Her roster of stars,

POLITICIANS/ D4

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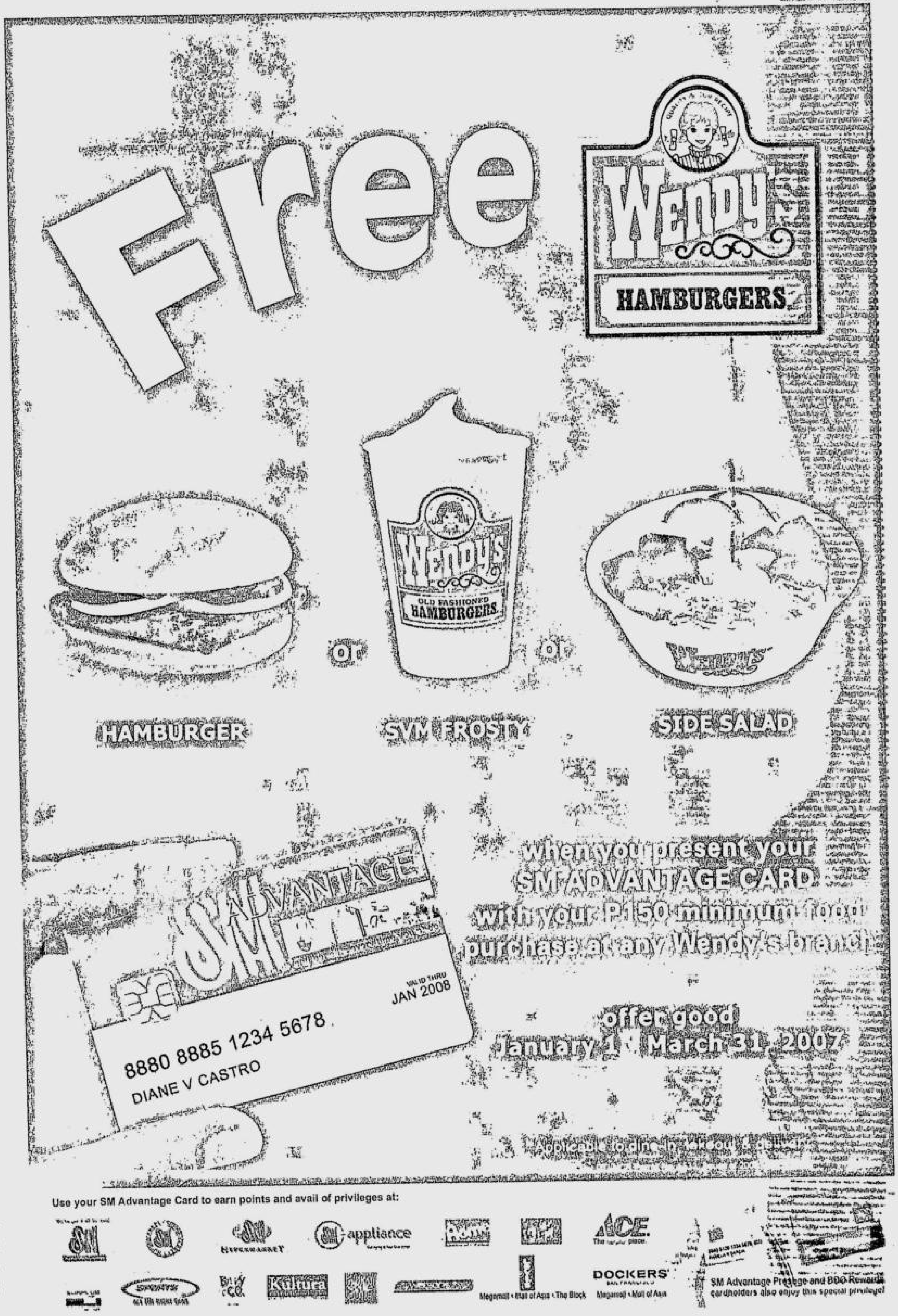
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DICAPRIO AND HOUNSOU. Play men with radically different agendas in "The Blood Diamond."

Sequels, crowd-plea

because its resident superhero is taking a much darker turn this time around.

The latest Harry Potter sequel, **"Order of the Phoenix,"** similarly "shocks" because its heretofore juvenile leads, particularly Daniel Radcliffe, now come across as young adults.

Finally, **"Shrek 3"** is another potential winner, especially because its voice cast includes Cameron Diaz and her real-life squeeze, Justin Timberlake.

Has-been singer

Film buffs are also keeping an eager eye out for **"Music & Lyrics,"** a winsome movie in which Hugh Grant plays a has-been singer from the '80s whose comeback hangs on the lyric-writing skills of a woman played by Drew Barrymore.

The film looks—and sounds—like a winner in our book, because it casts its leads daringly against type, and gives them an opportunity to show viewers that they're capable of more than their standard rom-com portrayals.

Fans of TV's **"The Simpsons"** are thrilled because, after 18 years on the tube, the popular animated sitcom is hitting the big screen. The film's

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trailer is fun and feisty, and the full-length production should do very well indeed in theaters.

As for the film version of the hit musical, **"Hairspray,"** fans are making a beeline for it because it features John Travolta—in a dress!

Much more imminent on screen here are these similarly noteworthy productions:

On Jan. 8, **"The Blood Diamond,"** co-starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou as two men with radically different agendas who are hell-bent on getting their hands on a rare pink diamond. Jennifer Connelly co-stars.

Museum guard

"A Night at the Museum," starring Ben Stiller, is a hit in the US, and should also do very well here. Stiller plays a new museum guard who discovers that, after viewing hours, the exhibits on view come alive and have a fun party!

For his part, Denzel Washington topbills the mystifying **"Déjà Vu,"** a film that fuses past and present. In the beguiling psycho-action production, Washington's character is able to change the course of events that have already transpired. How in blazes does he do *that*? You'll have to watch the film to find out!

MAGUIRE. A darker turn for the superhero.

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Lessons from the past year

STREET SMART

Mandy Navasero

FOR A MOTHER: "MAKE YOUR HOME A safest place for your children." Mothers do the dreaming for their kids.

From a doctor: "At home, exude what is positive, and children will imbibe it; project the negative, and they will also imbibe it."

No one can tell you the meaning of your life; it's something you alone can answer.

Emotional difficulties

Life is difficult. Man has a tendency to skirt around problems rather than deal with them head-on. This practice and the emotional difficulties inherent in them can lead to mental illness.

Life gets easier when you have a friend you can confide in. It's liberating to have a confidante who understands, and with whom you neither measure words nor weigh your thoughts. With a breath of kindness, he/she can blow all your troubles away.

Learn to say no.

Honesty

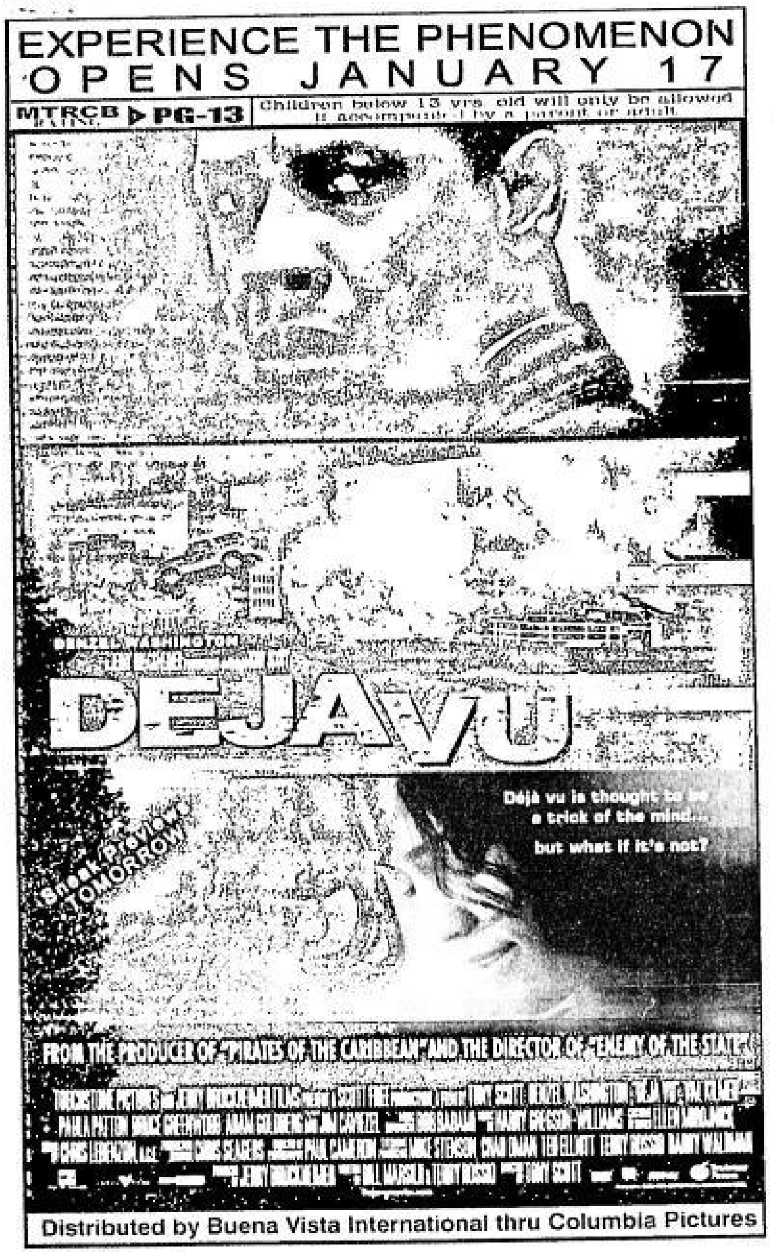
Without honesty, there's no truth; without truth, there's no understanding; without understanding, there's no love, and without love, there's nothing.

Best of all, last year, I learned to walk with God.

* * *

Registration for the Mandy Navasero Batanes Photo Safari (from April 5 to 8) ends on Jan. 15. Call 899-1767, or e-mail mandy-navasero@yahoo.com.ph

"MANO PO." Lily Monteverde's productions about *Chinoy* life has become a festival staple.



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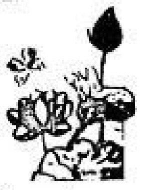
No old age for the soul

LOTUS POND



R. Valencia and S. Bismark

THE PASSAGE OF time makes us face certain realities and one big truth: Our aging bodies.

Someone once said, "Aging makes us more down to earth. Things will eventually start to move southward—from facial muscles to breasts. Keeping thigs up becomes a struggle."

Hollywood is the capital of show business—the center of man's fight against age. There's a "crusade" to fight the natural process of aging through interventions like plastic surgery and liposuction. Products are promoted as "anti-aging," "youth enhancing," or "body-building."

Laws of nature

Many celebrities spend lots of money to retain their youth. But, it's a losing battle. Nobody wins when man tries to control the laws of nature. The sooner we accept this reality, the wiser and less frustrated we become.

If we realize that each passing year makes our bodies older and less youthful, what do we do about it? Sages realize the temporary nature of the material body, and they seek the higher consciousness of the eternal. Why struggle over something that can't be saved?

Goal

Time is precious. Man's body is a valuable tool used in achieving the most important goal of existence: Self-realization.

Celebrities should know that time sets a limit on youth. But the spirit-soul—the person inside the material garment—is ageless and eternal.

There's no need to despair about getting older. A sage feels happy with the knowledge that his true nature is part and parcel of the Supreme. As a spiritual being, he inherently possesses knowledge and eternal beauty.

Inner beauty

Inner beauty, after all, comes from the spirit-soul itself. It radiates through its material casing.

There's no old age for the soul. Living according to our spiritual identity brings happiness and peace of mind. When we embrace the security of eternal life, our struggle ends.

Politicians and artists don't mix

From page D1

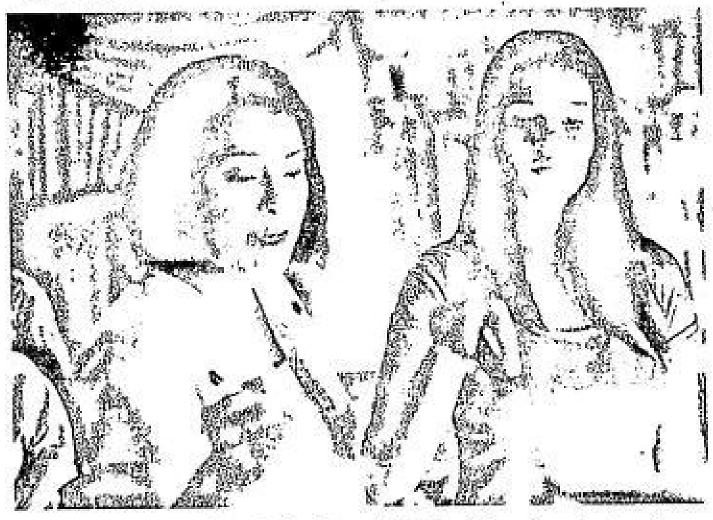
flashy production design and foreign locations have attracted our movie-going audiences.

Controversy

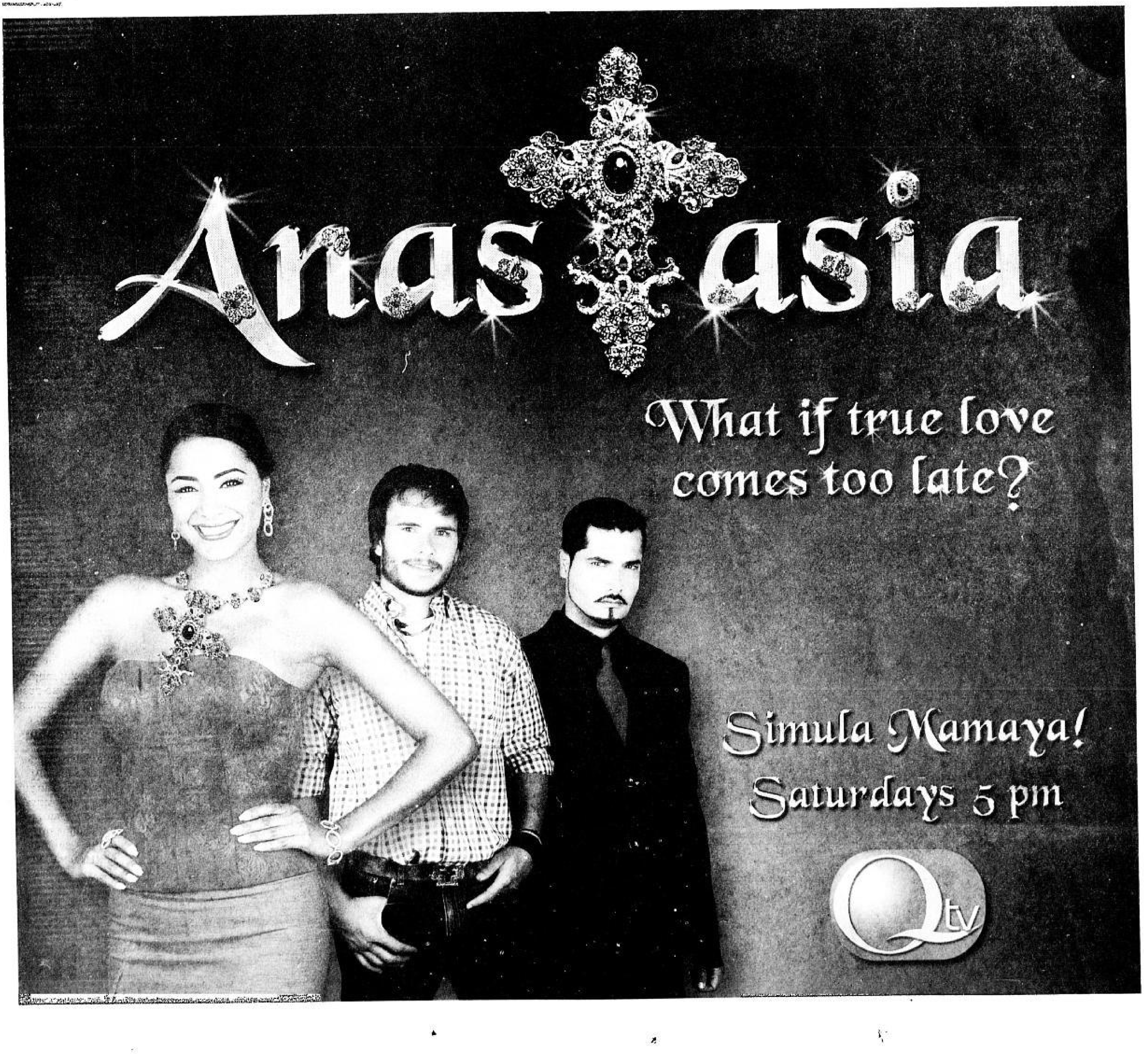
Unfortunately, controversies have also become a staple of the MMFF. One infamous year, the controversy centered on the number of entries a producer could enter.

It's time the film fest is handed over to a group of responsible, thinking, cultural workers who understand its real meaning. And they can learn from past mistakes.

Whoever's on top of the festival must resolve to uphold its artistic integrity, and to make sure that the grain is separated from the chaff. Yes, separate the politicians from the artists because, if I may quote Rudyard Kipling, "Never the twain shall meet!"



SHERYL Cruz and Iza Calzado topbill the "Yaya" episode of "Shake, Rattle and Roll 8."



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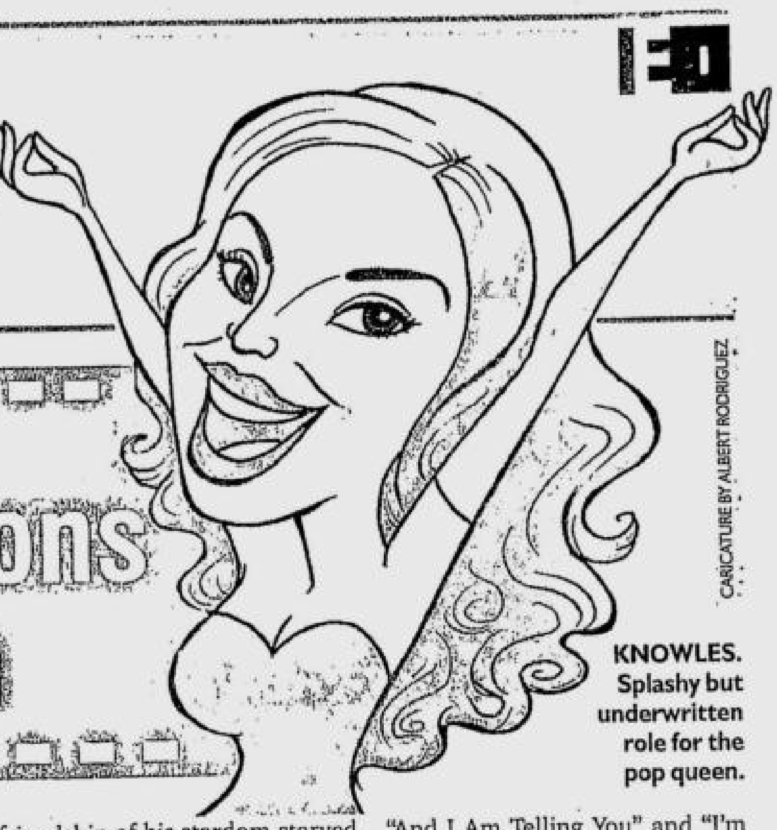
SNEAK PREVIEW

'Dreamgirls' transcends limitations in rousing big-screen version


CARICATURE BY ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

KNOWLES. Splashy but underwritten role for the pop queen.

By Rito P. Asilo

"Dreamgirls"

D: Bill Condon

S: Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Hudosn, Eddie Murphy, Jamie Foxx

BILL CONDON'S BIG-SCREEN adaptation of Tom Eyen and Henry Krieger's 1981 Broadway smash doesn't come close to the lush theatricality of Baz Luhrmann's "Moulin Rouge" or the spectacular terpsichorean sizzle of Rob Marshall's "Chicago" (the screenplay for which Condon also wrote).

But, for all its shortcomings, from the musical's generally unremarkable—and limiting—music to its redundant rants about a "new sound" and a "new social order," this fast-paced cinematic charmer scores where Luhrmann and Marshall's otherwise dazzling productions were wanting: In magnificent singing, which is where Condon's movie derives its cinematic soul.

In Faustian, fiction-mirrors-fact fashion, the intriguing tale of car salesman-turned-talent manager and music mogul, Curtis Taylor Jr. (Jamie Foxx), and his Dreamgirls is the thinly veiled story of The Supremes and Berry Gordy Jr., the visionary force behind the legendary Motown sound, who "infamously" replaced the popular girl group's lead singer, Florence Ballard, with the prettier, thinner and more marketable Diana Ross—for crossover appeal. (Tragically, Ballard succumbed to complications of alcoholism and depression in 1976 at age 32.)

In the movie, The Dreams are composed of Deena Jones (Beyoncé Knowles), Lorrell Robinson (Anika Noni Rose), Michelle Morris (Sharon Leal), and Effie White (Jennifer Hudson), who bested 781 other actresses, including "American Idol" rival, Fantasia Barrino, for the role).

ROSE. KNOWLES AND HUDSON. Bring well-loved musical to sizzling, soaring cinematic life.

The talented girl group—initially composed of Effie, Deena and Lorrell—is hired to sing backup for the heroin-snorting, skirt-chasing, James Brown-like soul singer, James Thunder Early (Eddie Murphy), after Taylor rigs a talent competition against the girls.

Soon after, the manipulative talent manager puts the beautiful and subservient Deena in the lead, and replaces the brilliant but difficult Effie ("I don't do backup, I don't do oohs and ahhs!," she boldly declares) with Michelle. Will the stubborn Ms White suffer the same ignominy and bankruptcy as Ms Ballard?

Condon ("Kinsey," "Gods and Monsters") examines the politics of stardom and the flash-versus-substance debate that soon wreaks havoc on the lives and friendship of his stardom-starved protagonists. Moreover, the insightful director injects social commentary about racial issues and the irrelevance of war.

More than any aspect of his movie, however, it's the actors' flashy and gutsy performances that make the production better than the material it's based on:

Despite his role's almost one-note character sketch, Foxx manages to clarify Taylor's selfish motivations. Rose and Leal likewise turn in delightful performances.

On the other hand, Murphy makes full use of his sardonic wit and comic edge to breathe life and magic into Early's complex artistic nature.

For her part, Hudson's riveting, career-making turn is Oscar bait, and guaranteed to steal your heart. A star, indeed, is born! Of course, if you have thespic sensitivity to go with your steely pipes, it's hard to go wrong with soaring, lung-busting numbers like "And I Am Telling You" and "I'm Changing."

Be forewarned, though: The jaw-dropping scenes that feature those crowd-pleasing songs will have you cheering and wondering, "Fantasia who?"

To be fair, the beautiful and talented Beyoncé also delivers the goods. Unfortunately, Knowles' splashy, underwritten role is decorative at best. It's a relief then that, in one scene (a rapturous moment that ranks up there with Hudson's scene-chewing "And I Am Telling You"), a self-written song, "Listen," is added to demonstrate the pop queen's vocal range and dramatic sensitivity—a sparkling display of Beyoncé's not-often-noticed thespic skill.

Don't miss the movie—and savor the audio-visual thrill of witnessing four brave women traverse rocky, often overlapping roads to realize their cherished dreams!

Less predictable tracks in rock anthology

By Noelani Torre

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU'D CALL DEFINITIVE, but there are certainly more than a few interesting numbers in Warner Music's "Big Rock" anthology. With a 17-track playlist, the CD features singles from a variety of artists ranging from Green Day to The Flaming Lips.

Album opener is My Chemical Romance's "Helena (So Long and Goodnight)," culled from the punk-pop quintet's sophomore album, "Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge."

Ubiquitous

Released in 2003, it's a song that people are familiar with, though not as easily recognizable as their ubiquitous hit, "Welcome to the Black Parade."

"Helena" is followed by emo-rock Taking Back Sunday's "MakeDamnSure," a recent release culled from last year's "Louder Now." Running along practically the same emo vein (though with a more pop flavor) is the next track, "I Write Sins, Not Tragedies," from the Las Vegas-based group, Panic! at the Disco.

The playlist takes a less predictable turn in the fourth track with "Cash Machine," by the English quartet, Hard-Fi. Hook-laden and sounding brand new, the song hasn't suffered the bad effects of overplaying yet and, as a consequence, sounds quite fresh.

Not so fresh

Not so fresh anymore are one-third of the songs, including Green Day's "American Idiot" (from the boys' Grammy-winning 2004 album); Muse's "Time is Running Out"; Coldplay's "Clocks"; Snow Patrol's "Run"; and—believe it or not—Radiohead's "Paranoid Android," from the g roup's acclaimed 1997 album, "OK Computer."

It's a good thing that all these songs have the makings of a classic (the last, of course, is already considered one), so at least, it's not tiring to listen to them.

Similarly, songs like The Killers' "Mr. Brightside" and Gorillaz's "Dare" haven't been played as often on the radio, so their edges haven't yet been dulled out by over-familiarity.

Old material

Other seldom-heard tracks are Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy" and The Flaming Lips' "Yeah Yeah Yeah Song." The Goo Goo Dolls' "Stay With You," which comes from their recent album, "Let Love In," may still be considered new, but it sounds so much like the band's old material that it actually sounds dated.

The slower numbers in the lineup have likewise suffered from overexposure—like Keane's "Somewhere Only We Know" and Daniel Powter's "Bad Day"—so they tend to blur into the background.

Thankfully, after being lulled by ending tracks, "High" (James Blunt), and the aforementioned "Stay With You" and "Bad Day," the collection ends with a bang, care of The Flaming Lips' quirky "Yeah Yeah Yeah Song."

THE FLAMING Lips' quirky cut ends the genre album with a bang.

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3	ENTENG KABISOTE 3 12:50, 3:15, 5:50, 8:25, 11:00 G	
4	SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8 2:45, 5:35, 8:25, 11:00 PG-13	

Better shows for children needed

By Nestor U. Torre

FOR YEARS NOW, WE'VE BEEN urging producers to whip up good shows, films and albums for teenagers, simply because they comprise such a huge part of the country's demographic, and yet they've been largely passed up in favor of productions full of violence and sex.

Happily, productions for teens have been on the upswing on the small and big screens, so it's time to shift our focus to the equally important area of quality productions for *children.*

Since most shows are produced by adults, they don't engender the sense of wonder and imagination that we should foster in the country's very young viewers. More often, children are depicted on TV and in the movies as sassy, little adults who are fixated on "crushes" at a much too early age.

There's a huge need for productions that depict children as *children*, and shows and movies that can do that imaginatively and entertainingly should benefit from parents and teachers' grateful support.

Local theater people's positive experience with hit children's productions suggests that their TV and film counterparts will be similarly popular—provided they aren't sassy, *porma* and cynical, as is more usually the case.

A good example is the Australian kiddie show and act, "Hi-5." The peppy group's performances and albums are acclaimed, and they are popular even in the United States.

"HI-5." Group member Kathleen de Leon (center) is a Fil-Australian.

Good values

It's interesting to point out that one of the group's members is Fl-Australian Kathleen de Leon. Like the group's other ace singer-dancers, she makes it easy for the show's very young audience to learn and acquire good values.

It would be great if De Leon could visit Manila to teach producers here how to come up with similar shows and acts, without losing sight of the special viewing needs of pre-school viewers.

Some years ago, good programming for children got a boost with the production of such standout TV shows as "Sineskwela," "Hirayamanawari" and "Pahina."

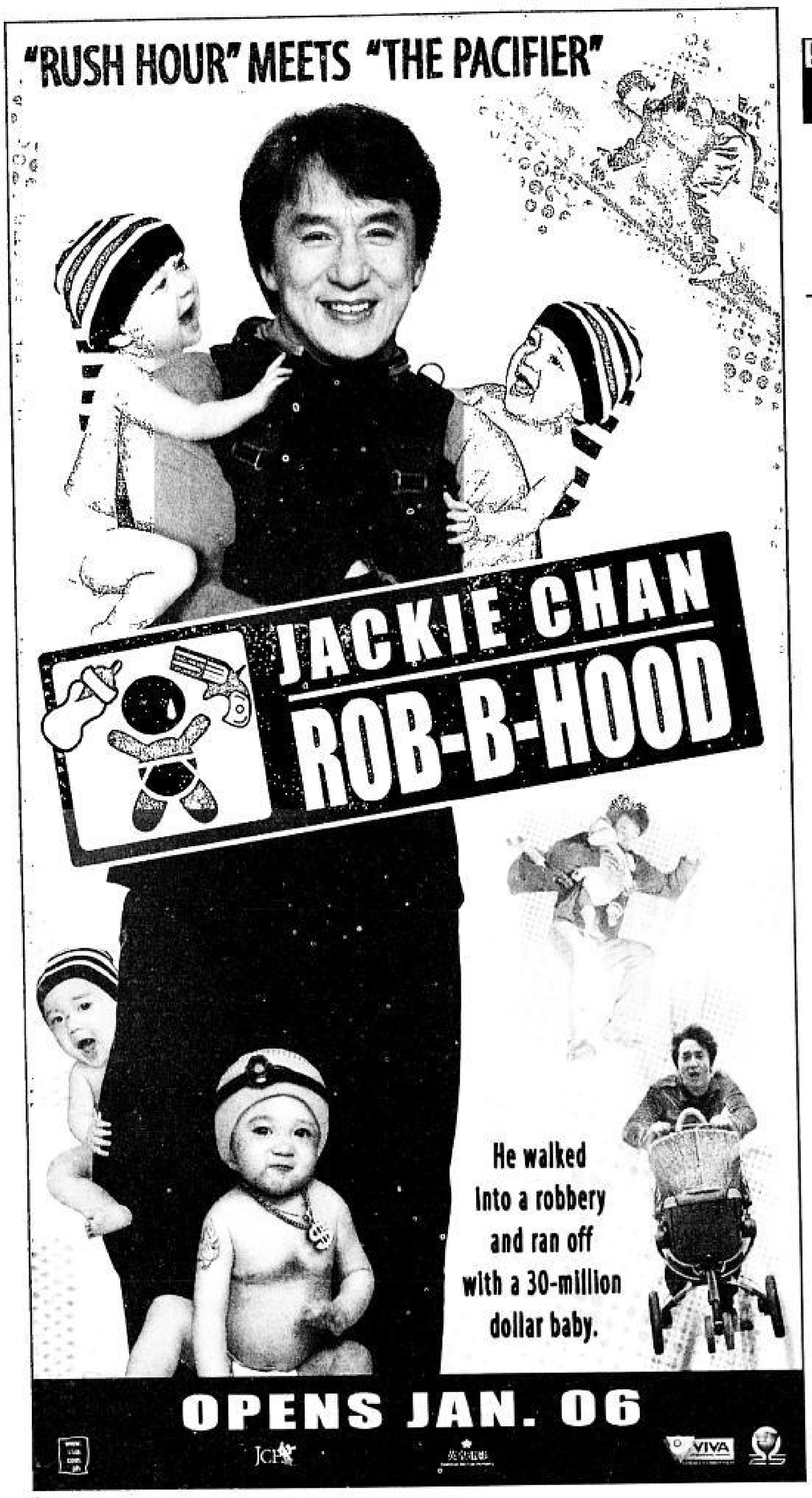
Alas, those shows are currently seen only on replay, so fresh inputs are definitely needed by the millions of Filipino kids who are often poorly served by the TV industry.

This is ironic, since advertising people know that products for children are bestsellers, and that, quite often, it's the kids who persuade their parents to buy the products so seductively plugged in TV commercials.

Viewing options

So, children should really get better viewing options, because it's their little minds, hearts and hands that are driving the broadcast and advertising industries' commercial engine, at least as far as products for children are concerned.

If kids like the shows they view and their parents see that they're acquiring good values from viewing them, they will support those better shows, and the products advertised in them—and, everybody wins!



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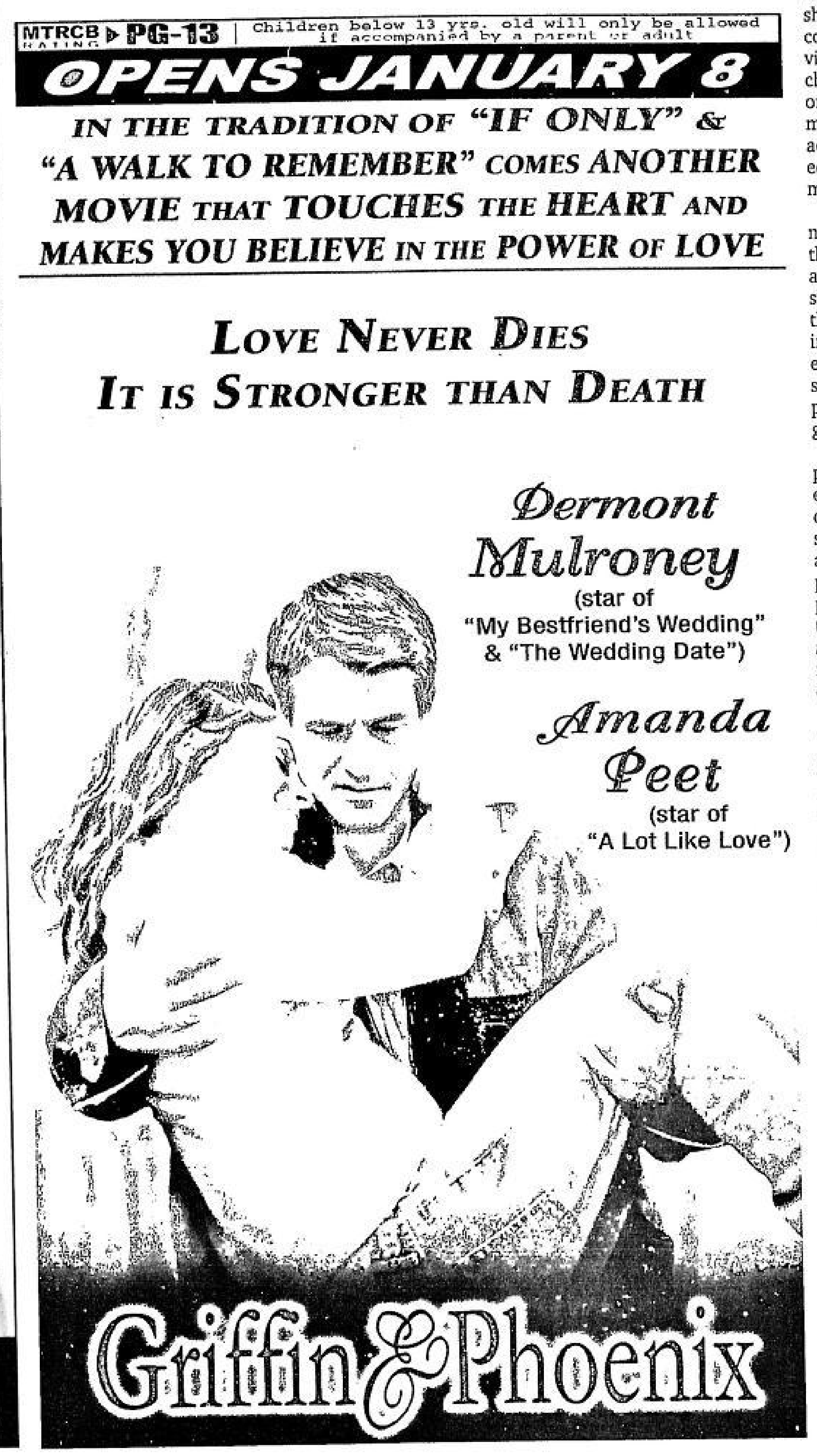

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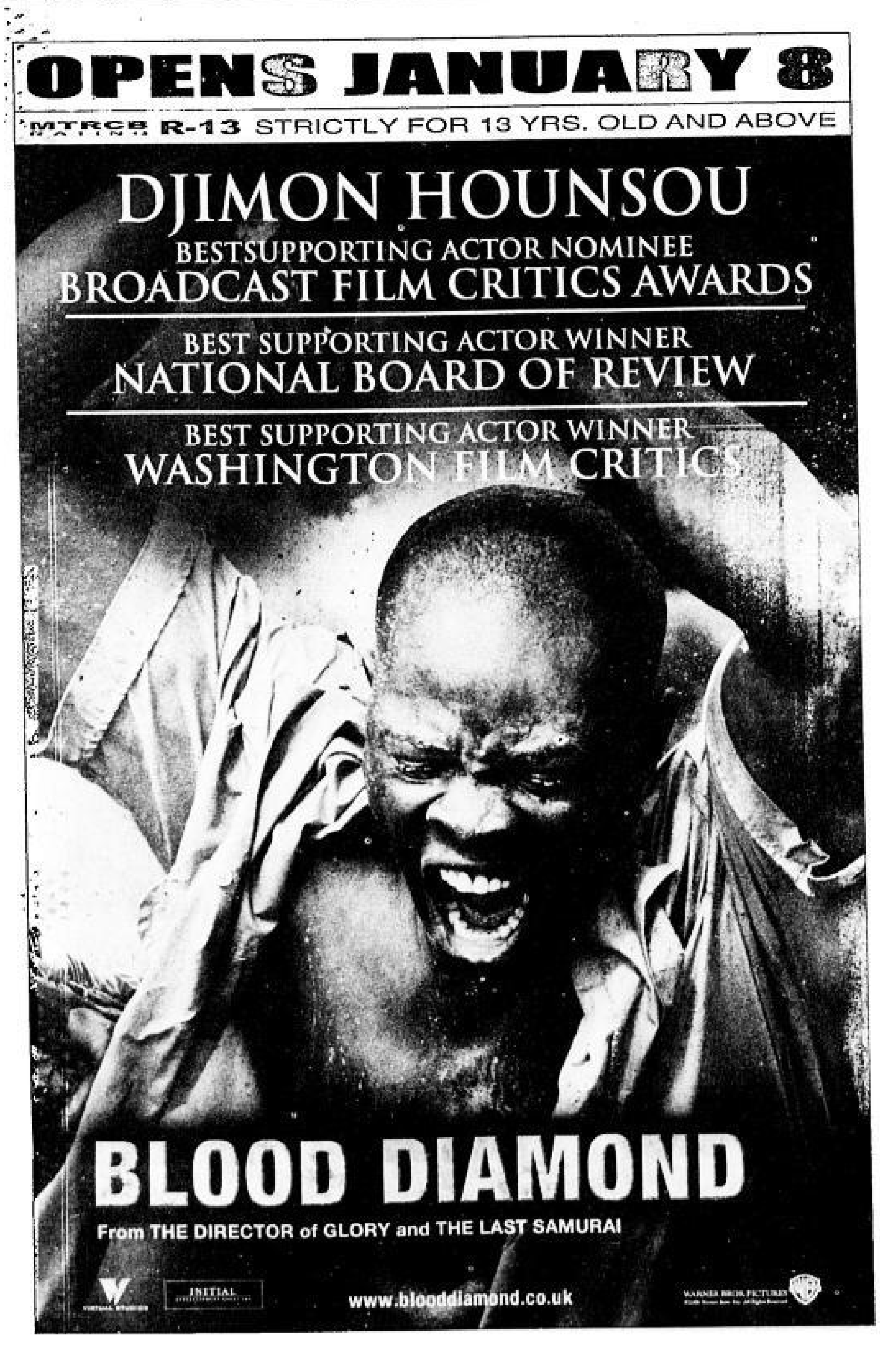

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Last...

From page E5

disparate realms of the scientific world.

'Moose Murders'

Starting Jan. 12, Repertory Philippines stages Frank Rich's "Moose Murders" at Onstage, Greenbelt 1, Makati City. The play is directed by Michael Williams.

Carlo Aquino

Former child actor Carlo Aquino has established himself as a teenage thespian of the first order.

Last year, his sterling performances on "Bituing Walang Ningning" and the "Scapular" episode on "Maala-ala Mo Kaya" on TV, and "Pagkagising Mula sa Kamulatan" on the big screen, won him both acclaim and awards (Golden Screen, Star Awards for TV).

Ever the hard and creative worker, Carlo hopes to build on those successes with even more resolute efforts this year, paced by his new TV soap, "Makita Ka Lang Muli."

'Blessings in Disguise'

Get your copy of the third volume of Butch Jimenez andFlor Gozon Tarriela's book, "Blessings in Disguise," a compilation of more than 100 inspiring true-to-life stories about coping with failure, loss, disappointment and heartache.

It features the touching stories of celebrities and media personalities like Felipe and Benjamin Gozon, Iza Calzado, Dulce, Princess Punzalan, Donita Rose and National Artist for Literature Alejandro Roces.

The book is available at Powerbooks, National Bookstore, the Philippine Bible Society and OMF outlets. Call 867-1055 or 0906 506-4764.

Movies on TV

On HBO, today at 6 a.m., "Sleuth." Tomorrow at 7:45 a.m., "The Education of Little Tree." Jan. 8 at 9 p.m., "Broken Flowers." Jan. 9 at 1:30 p.m., "Twilight Zone, The Movie." Jan. 10 at 7 p.m., "Ed TV." Jan. 11 at 7 p.m., "Lords of Dogtown." Jan. 12 at 9 p.m., "Back to the Future 3."

On Cinemax, today at 9 p.m., "The School of Rock." Tomorrow at 7:30 a.m., "Apt Pupil." Jan. 8 at 3:15 p.m., "Catch-22." Jan. 9 at 6 a.m., "Land of the Pharaohs." Jan. 10 at 5:15 p.m., "The Cowboy Way." Jan. 11 at 11:45 a.m., "Carlito's Way." Jan. 12 at 7 p.m., "The Spitfire Grill."

AQUINO. Teenage thespian of the first order.

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Pops Fernandez
Rustom Padilla
Zsa Zsa Padilla
ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH
ZE MOVEEH

ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH
ZE MOVEEH

Ada (Rustom Padilla) a soft-spoken prim gay man who runs a parlor business, surprisingly received a mysterious stone from above with the word "Zaturnnah" engraved on it. Ada attempts to gulp it down and suddenly magically transformed into Zsa Zsa Zaturnnah (Zsa Zsa Padilla), a superhero with fierce beauty, immense strength and striking hair color! Zsa Zsa Zaturnnah is out to save everyone from the evil Queen Femina (Pops Fernandez) who wants to invade their town.

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8 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8
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10 SUPER NOYPI
11 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
12 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH

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4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
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6 TATLONG BARAHA/ DEJA VU
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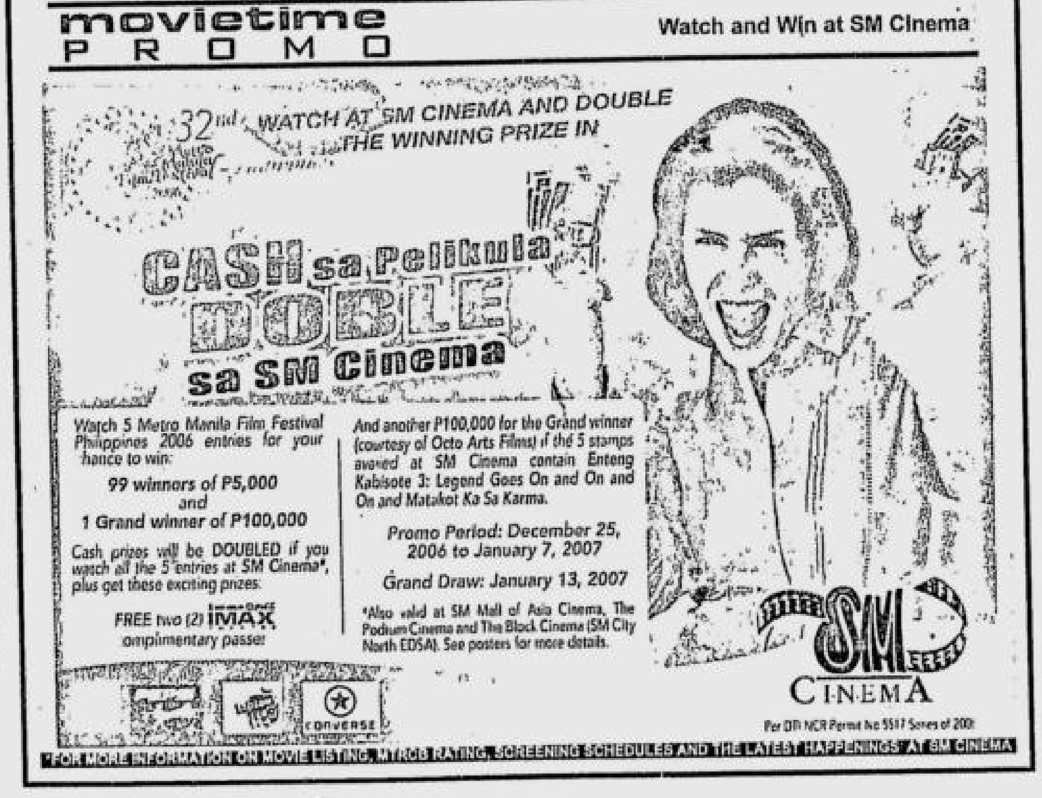

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10:45 1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
1:20 4:10 7:00 9:50
4 MANO PO 5
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
12:20 2:45 5:10 7:35 10:00
6 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
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7 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
8 SUPER NOYPI
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
9 TATLONG BARAHA
DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
10 LIGALIG
1:20 3:30 5:40 7:50 10:00

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12:35 3:00 5:25 7:45 10:00
2 LIGALIG
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3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
4 MANO PO 5
12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 9:50
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
12:25 2:20 4:15 6.10 8.05 10:00
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 10:00
7 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00

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DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
11:25 1:55 4:25 6:55 9:20
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
11:25 1:50 4:15 6:40 9:05
4 SUPER NOYPI
11:20 1.40 4:00 6:30 9:00
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
12:50 2.50 4.50 6:50 9.00
6 MANO PO 5
1:00 3 40 6:20 9:00
7 LIGALIG
12:50 2:50 4:50 6:50 9:00
8 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
10:40 1:20 4:00 6:40 9:10

NOVALICHES
935-3231 / 935-3229-30

1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH / DEJA VU
7 LIGALIG
8 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

PIONEER
687-5378

1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SNEAK PREVIEWS
at all Robinsons Movieworld
january 6 & 7
MTRCB RATING, PG13
REGULAR SHOWING, JANUARY 17

For Screening Schedule, pls. contact our CINEMA ACCESS [illegible]

STA ROSA
(049) 837-090[illegible]

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 MANO PO 5
3 SUPER NOYPI / DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
5 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8

LIPA
(043) 757-3684
(043) 312-5870

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8/DEJA VU / DEJA VU
3 LIGALIG
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

DASMARINAS
(046) 852-2125
(046) 416-4332

1 SUPER NOYPI
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
5 MANO PO 5 / DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW

ANGELES
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1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 MANO PO 5
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8/DEJA VU

IMUS
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(046) 471-8188

1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA/ DEJA VU
3 MANO PO 5
4 SUPER NOYPI
5 LIGALIG
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

STARMILLS
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(045) 864-5270

1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO 5
5 LIGALIG / DEJA VU SNEAK PREVIEW
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

BACOLOD
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(034) 441-0459

1 MANO PO 5
2 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
5 LIGALIG
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH / DEJA VU

ILOILO
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1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 SUPER NOYPI / DEJA VU SNEAK
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
6 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8

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CINEMA 1 **MANO PO 5**
11:00, 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00
GP

CINEMA 2 **SHAKE RATTLE & ROLL**
11:50, 2:50, 5:45, 8:40
PG13

DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

PROMENADE
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CINEMA 3 **KARMA/DEJAVU**
10:45, 12:50, 2:55, 5:00, 7:05, 9:40
PG13

CINEMA 4 **ENTENG KABISOTE**
10:45, 1:15, 3:40, 6:05, 8:35
GP

CINEMA 5 **KASAL KASALI KASALO**
11:45, 2:05, 4:20, 6:35, 8:50
PG13

TICKET PRICES & SCREENING TIME SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE. FOR CINEMA INQUIRIES, CALL: 722 4496.

MUSIC MUSEUM

JAN 06, 2007	Razorback and Wolfgang	8:30 PM
JAN 23, 2007	Marissa Sanchez	8:30 PM

TEATRINO
PROMENADE GREENHILLS

EVERY MONDAY	DANCE NIGHT	7:00PM
Jan 13, 2007	Rachel Gerodias	8:30 PM
Jan 16, 23, 30, 2007	Dyords Ko Po FOR INQUIRIES PLS CALL 722 4532 LOC 116	8:30 PM

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Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41
DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

SHAKE RATTLLE & ROLL 8 **PG13** 2:20,5:00,7:40,10:20	**ENTENG KABISOTE 3** **G** 1:10,3:30,5:50,8:10,10:30	**MATAKOT KA SA KARMA** **PG13** 1:30,3:40,5:50,8:00,10:10
MANO PO 5: GUA AI DI **G** 12:30,3:00,5:30,8:00,10:30	**ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH** **G** 12:40,3:05,5:30,7:45,10:20	**KASAL, KASALI, KASALO** **PG13** 1:40,3:50,6:00,8:10,10:20

MOVIES AND SCREENING SCHEDULES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE. FOR VERIFICATION CALL 898-1440/41

SHANG CINEPLEX

① **ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH**
MTRCB GP 12:00, 2:25, 4:50
DEJA VU
MTRCB PG-13 7:20, 10:00

② **ENTENG KABISOTE**
MTRCB: GP
2:05, 4:40, 7:20, 10:00

③ **KASAL KASALI KASALO**
MTRCB: PG-13
12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:40, 10:00

④ **SHAKE RATTLE & ROLL 8**
MTRCB: PG-13
1:30, 4:20, 7:10, 10:00

PREMIERE THEATRE **MANO PO 5 (GUA AI DI)**
MTRCB GP 1:45, 4:20, 6:55, 9:30

Movies and schedules are subject to change without prior notice

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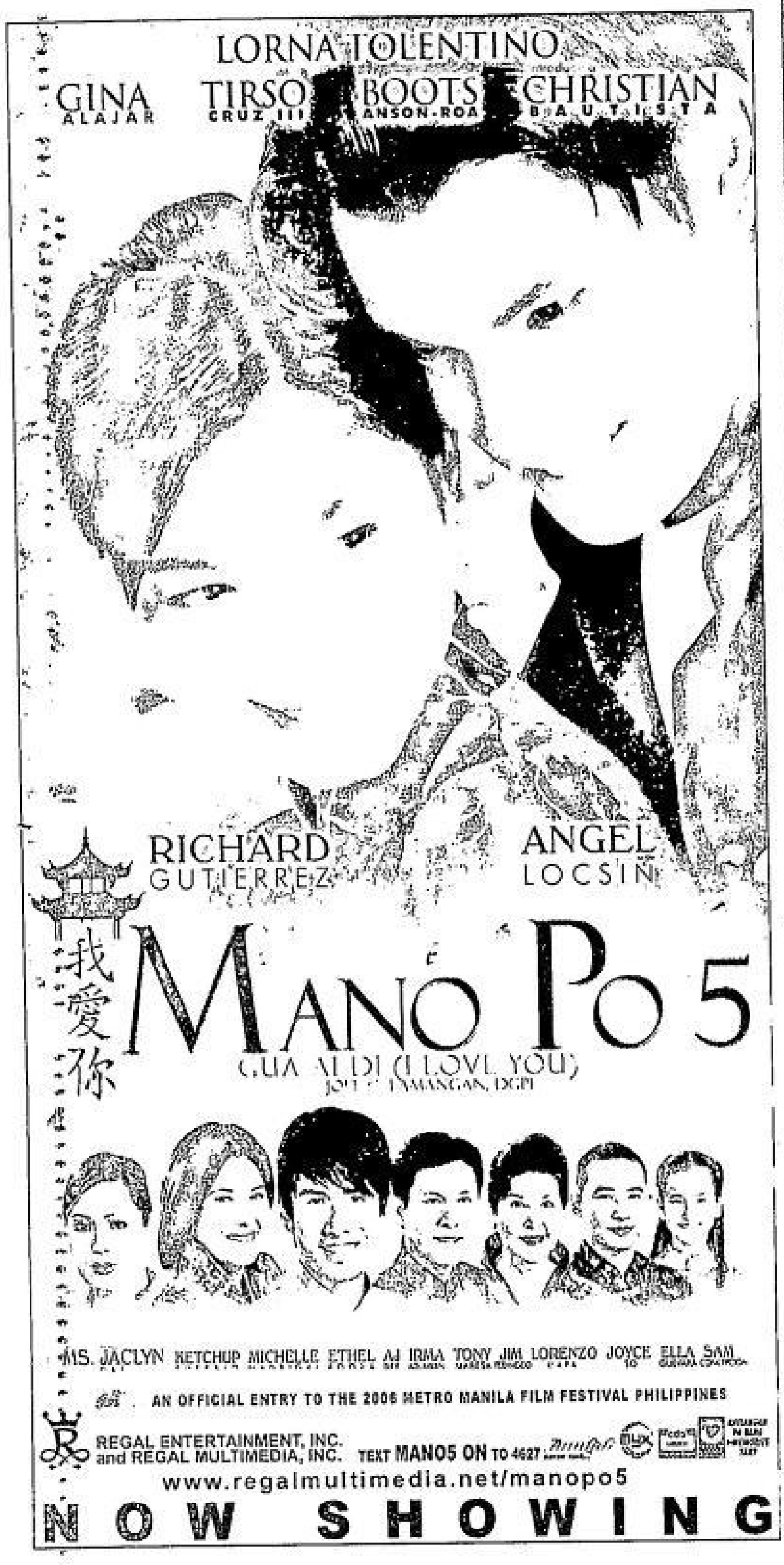
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GINA ALAJAR
TIRSO CRUZ III
BOOTS ANSON-ROA
CHRISTIAN BAUTISTA
RICHARD GUTIERREZ
ANGEL LOCSIN
我愛你
MANO PO 5
GUA AI DI (I LOVE YOU)
JOEL LAMANGAN, DGPI
MS. JACLYN KETCHUP MICHELLE ETHEL AJ IRMA TONY JIM LORENZO JOYCE ELLA SAM
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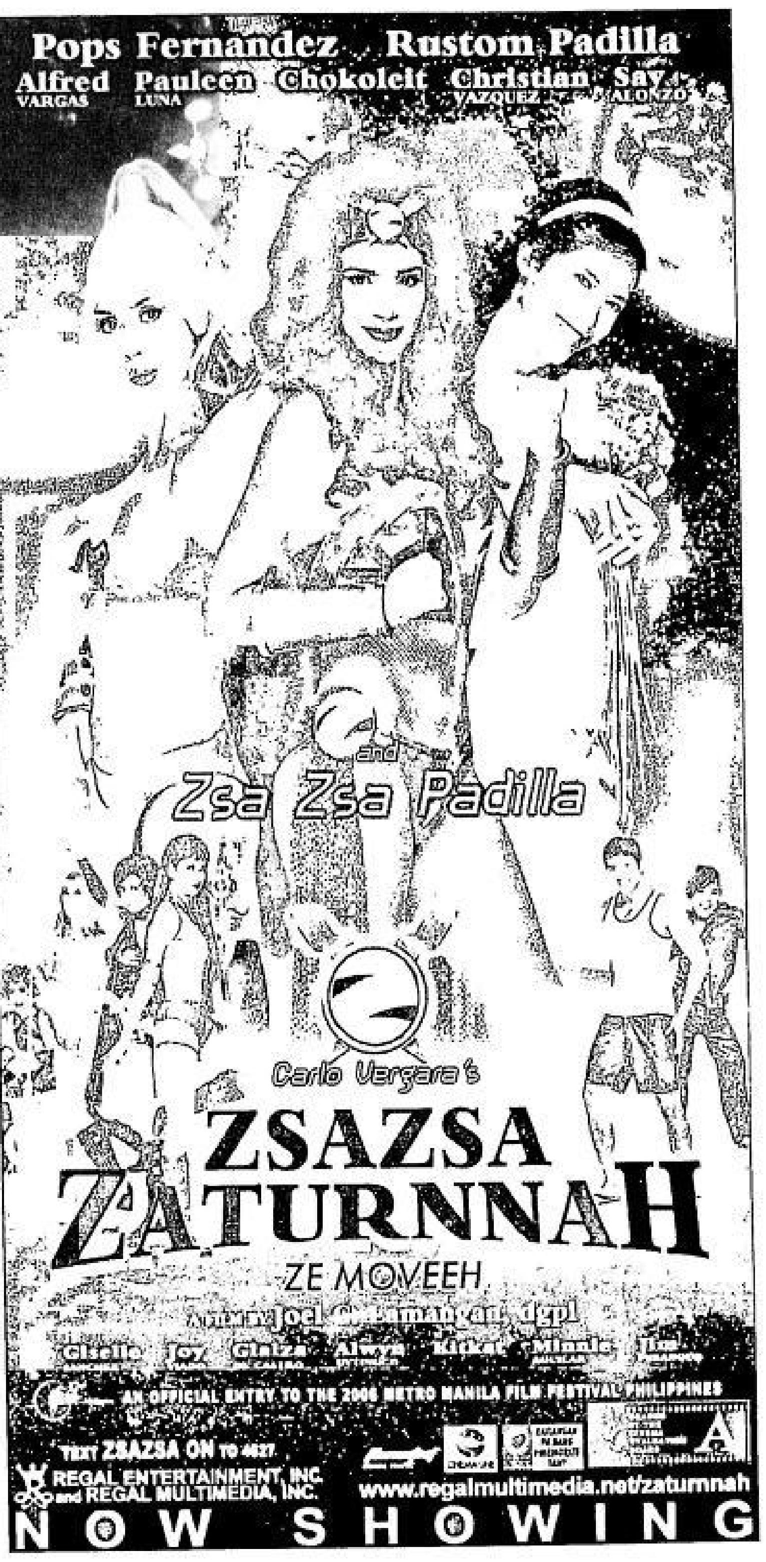
Pops Fernandez
Rustom Padilla
Alfred VARGAS
Pauleen LUNA
Chokoleit
Christian VAZQUEZ
Say ALONZO
and Zsa Zsa Padilla
Carlo Vergara's
ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH
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EUGENE DOMINGO
ROXANNE GUINOO
JOSEPH BITANGCOL
MIKO PALANCA
SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL 8
JOHN CARLOS
MICHAEL TUVIERA
TOPEL LEE
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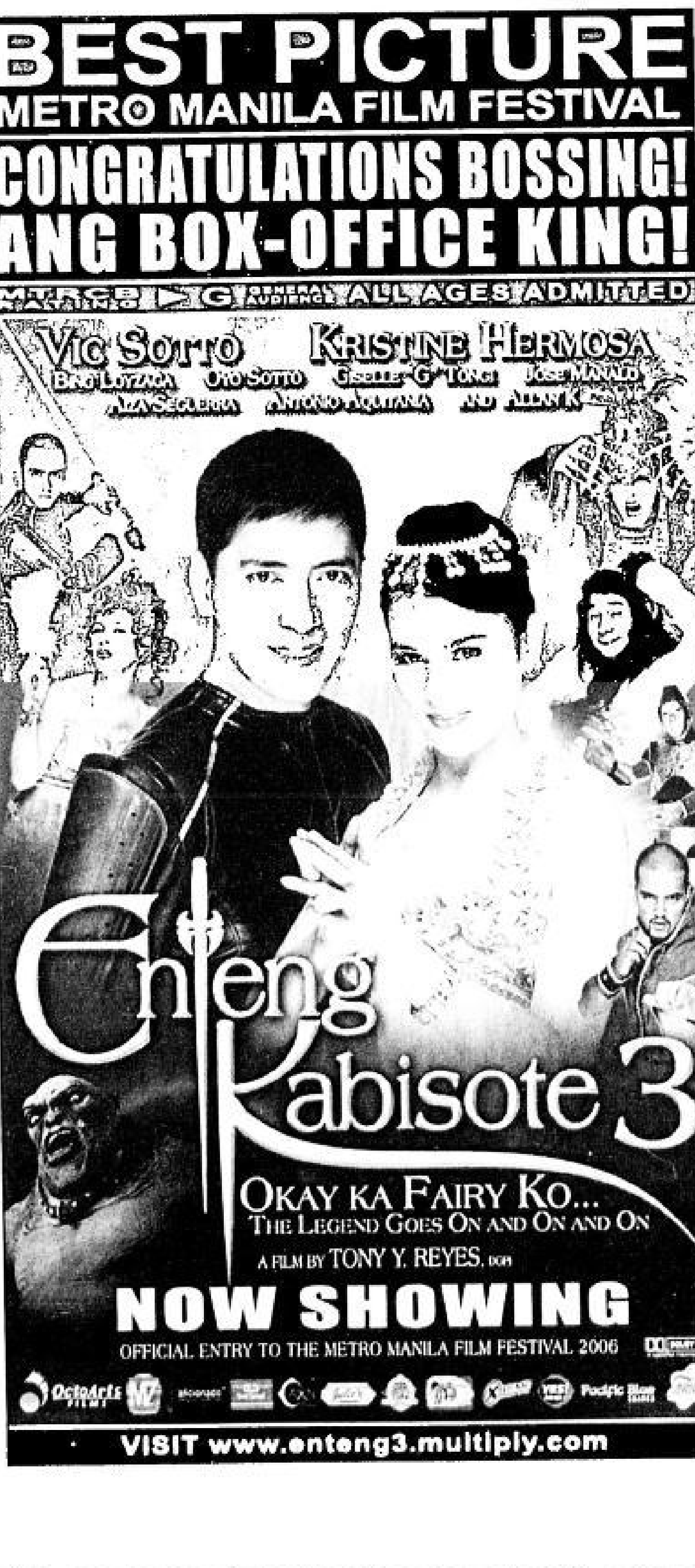
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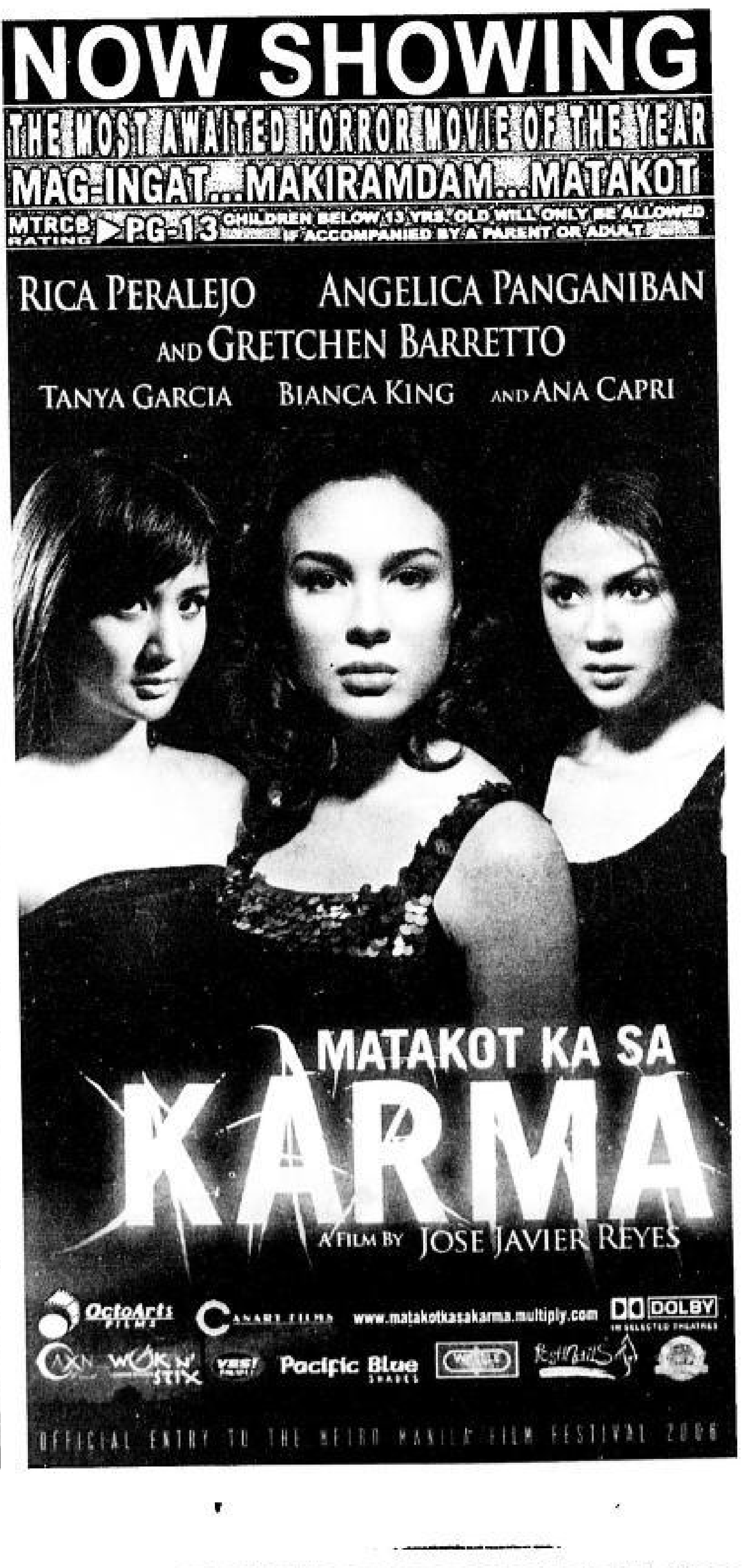
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Last day for ManoMano sale

MONTAGE

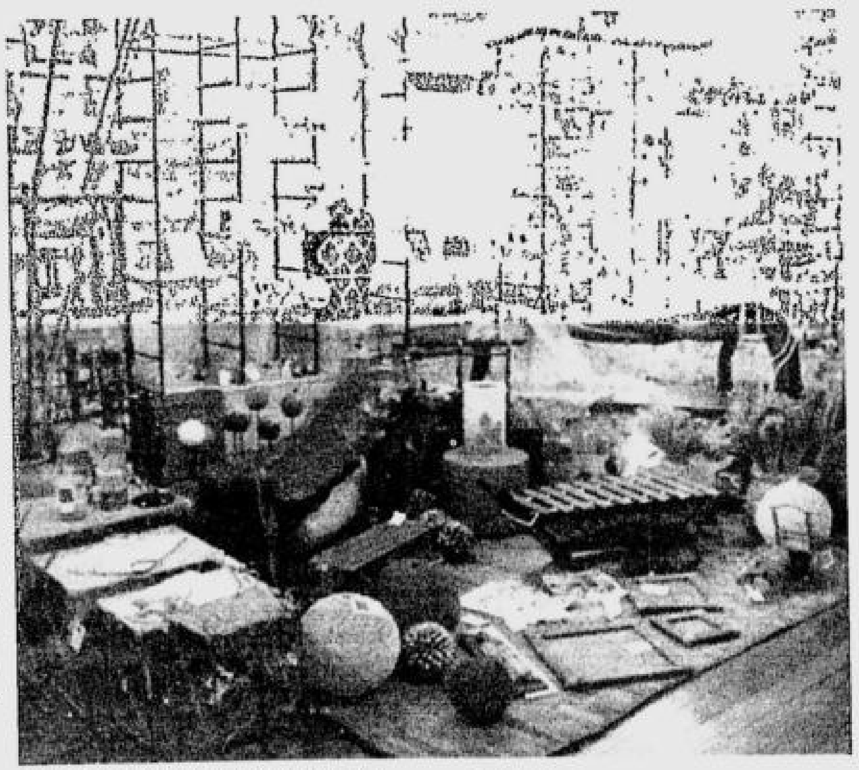
THE BIG SALE AT THE MANOMANO Fair Trade Store is on its last day. The handicrafts store showcases the best and most creative decor products from all over the Philippines. ManoMano is at 2594 Lamayan st., Sta. Ana, Manila (tel. 564-4169). It is operated by the Social Action Foundation for Rural and Urban Development Inc. (Safrudi).

'No Reservations'

Anthony Bourdain returns to Discovery Travel and Living with new episodes of "No Reservations," continuing his worldwide search for unique local cuisine and culture. Beginning Jan. 24, premiere episodes of the show air every Wednesday at 11 p.m., and encore on Sundays at 6 p.m. The Jan. 24 episode tokes viewers to Sweden.

'War of the Worlds'

On Jan. 27 at 9 p.m., HBO screens Steven Spielberg's sci-fi thriller, "War of the Worlds," starring Tom Cruise and Dakota Fanning. The film version of H.G. Wells' seminal classic dramatizes the first strike in a catastrophic alien attack on Earth.



HANDICRAFTS showcase in Sta. Ana, Manila is operated by Safrudi.

CRUISE AND FANNING. Topbill Steven Spielberg's seminal sci-fi drama.

Triple platinum

Kami nAPO Muna

THE APO retrospective is 2006's best-selling **OPM** album.

"Kami nAPO Muna," the tribute to the Apo Hiking Society by some of the country's leading bands and solo performers, has been certified triple platinum, and is the best-selling OPM album of 2006. The album of 18 songs is available on DVD and VCD.

'Discovery Rewind 2006'

Discovery Channel journeys through last year's biggest scientific events and breakthroughs in "Discovery Rewind 2006," replayed at 8 a.m. tomorrow and 5 p.m. on Jan. 13. The program features commentary by experts from

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SHAKE,RATTLE & ROLL 1:25 / 4:10 / 6:55 / 9:40	ENTENG KABISOTE 3 12:10 / 2:35 / 5:00 / 7:25 9:50	KASAL, KASALI, KASALO 11:40 / 1:30 / 2:10 / 4:00 4:40 / 7:10 / 9:40	GATEWAY PLATINUM CINEMA
MANO PO 5 11:50 / 2:20 / 4:50 / 7:20 9:50	SUPER NOYPI 11:20 / 2:10 / 4:30 / 6:50 9:20	MATAKOT KA SA KARMA 1:00 / 3:10 / 5:20 / 7:30 9:40	
DEJA VU 7:00 / 9:40	ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH 1:40 / 4:10 / 6:50 / 9:40	LIGALIG 1:30 / 3:30 / 5:30 / 7:30 9:30	MANO PO 5 1:30 / 4:00 / 6:30 / 9:00

Ali MALL 5

KASAL, KASALI, KASALO 12:35 / 3:05 / 5:35 / 8:05	ENTENG KABISOTE 3 12:00 / 1:25 / 3:50 / 6:15 / 8:40	SHAKE,RATTLE & ROLL 12:20 / 3:05 / 5:50 / 8:35
SUPER NOYPI 1:00 / 3:20 / 5:40 / 8:00	LIGALIG 12:40 / 2:30 / 4:20 / 6:10 / 8:00	DOLBY DIGITAL dts SDDS

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Movie schedules may change without prior notice. For verification please call 729 7777

G1 GLORIETTA 1	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	3 MANO PO 5 / DÉJÀ VU	4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
G4 GLORIETTA 4	1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA	2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	3 THX ENTENG KABISOTE 3 GUARANTEED SEATS	
	4 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	5 SUPER NOYPI / DÉJÀ VU	6	7 MANO PO 5
GB1 GREENBELT 1	1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO		
GB3 GREENBELT 3	1 THX ENTENG KABISOTE 3 GUARANTEED SEATS	2 THX KASAL, KASALI, KASALO GUARANTEED SEATS		
	3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH GUARANTEED SEATS	4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA / DÉJÀ VU GUARANTEED SEATS	5 MANO PO 5 GUARANTEED SEATS	
ATC ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 THX KASAL KASALI KASALO GUARANTEED SEATS	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3		
	3 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA / DÉJÀ VU	5 MANO PO 5	
ACC AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO	4 MANO PO 5 / DÉJÀ VU
M2 MARKET! MARKET!	1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA		
	3 SUPER NOYPI / DÉJÀ VU	4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO	5 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	

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Customer Service Numbers: Glorietta - 752 7272; from 10am to 9pm
Greenbelt - 757 4853: from 11am to 9pm
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Ayala Center Cebu - (032) 231 5342 loc 324
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GLORIETTA	ALABANG TOWN CENTER
Agent X44 Movie Promo Tour January 7, 2007	Power Rangers Space Patrol Delta (SPD) Meet & Greet Event January 21, 2007
AYALA CENTER CEBU	MARKET! MARKET!
Centenary Celebration of Montessori Education January 6 to 7, 2007	Nestle Breakfast Cereals Event January 6 to 7, 2007

GREENBELT — Greenbelt 5 Sneak Peek presents Collection of Arnel Papa
January 10 to 21, 2007

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GLORIETTA 1
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Punta Engano Road, Lapu Lapu Cebu
Tel. (632) 231-0288/Fax (632) 231-1688
www.shangri-la.com

Oakwood
Oakwood Premier Ayala Center
6th Floor, Glorietta 4, Ayala Center
Makati City, Metro Manila
Tel. (63.2) 729.8888 loc. 8101 Fax: : (63.2) 728.0000 / echua@oakwood..com.ph
www.oakwood.com

oasis
La Union Country Resort Hotel, Inc.
Sevilla, City of San Fernando, La Union Phil.
Tel. (072)242-5621/Fax. (072) 242-5631
www.oasiscountryresort.com
oasis@sflu.com

Subic
Subic International Hotel
Subic Bay, Free Port Zone, Olongapo City
Tel. 243-2222 / Fax 243-0852
www.subichotel.com

SUMMER PLACE HOTEL
Summer Place Hotel
Km. 288 Marcos Highway, Baguio City
Tel. :(074) 446.0560, 446.5400-01
www.SummerPlaceBaguio.com

TAAL VISTA HOTEL
Taal Vista Hotel
Managed by Fuego Hotels & Properties
Km. 60 Aguinaldo Highway, Tagaytay City
Tel. (632) 886-4325, (6346) 413-1000
Email : taalvista@fuegohotels.com

MARCO POLO Davao
The Marco Polo
CM Recto St. Davao City 8000
Tel. (082) 221-0888/fax (082) 225-0111
www.marcopolohotels.com

MANILA PAVILION
Manila Pavilion
United Nations Ave., cor. Ma. Orosa Orosa St., Manila
Tel. 526-1212 / Fax: 526-2552
www.manilapavilion.com.ph

Waterfront Hotel Lahug
1 Salinas Drive, Lahug Cebu City
Tel. (6332) 232-6888/Fax (6332)232-6880
www.waterfronthotels.net

Waterfront Hotel Mactan
1 Airport Road, Lapu Lapu City, 6015
Tel. (632) 340-4888/fax (632) 340-5693
www.waterfronthotels.net

Lunch offerings at Crowne Plaza

NOWADAYS, WHEN TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE and getting from one place to another is frenzied, it's always good to find great haunts where one can conduct business in a quiet yet elegant surrounding, enjoy delicious food, get pampered with great service - and best of all, at a reasonable price. Crowne Plaza Galleria Manila's Xin Tian Di Chinese restaurant promises all that with their new lunch offerings.

Executives and business people can now enjoy quick-to-prepare, yet delicious Lunch Set Menus for as low as P300++ per person. There are over 12 lunch, combinations to choose from including Chinese specialties like Roast Duck with sauteed Misua; Barbecue Spareribs with Vegetable Dumplings; assorted Dimsum Platter (Taro Puffs and Spring Rolls) served with Fookien Fried Rice and Soy Chicken with Yang Chow Fried Rice. All lunch combinations are served with a bowl of specialty soup to complete your meal.

If you and your associates are game for an afternoon dining adventure, then the unlimited Dimsum Lunch Buffet would be an enticing treat. It's hard to beat with over 40 choices and an ongoing 3+1 promo--at only P800++ per person! The Dimsum selections include sweet and savory items as well as scrumptious Dimsum desserts to top it all off!

Crowne Plaza's Xin Tian Di restaurant has gained recognition as one of the prominent Chinese restaurants in the Ortigas district. It is located at the 4th level of the hotel, with easy access to parking from the hotel's lobby or the adjacent Robinsons Galleria Mall. These lunch offerings are available everyday from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For advance reservations and information, call 633-7222 or e-mail mnlcp@ichotels-group.com. Crowne Plaza Galleria Manila is the newest luxury hotel in the Ortigas commercial and leisure hub, conveniently located at the corner of Ortigas and ADB Avenues. Crowne Plaza is also a member of the world's largest hotel chain, the Intercontinental Hotels Group.

Starting the year right at Dusit Hotel

DUSIT HOTEL NIKKO BELIEVES IN THE premise that indulgence makes the soul sing. This year, the hotel will stimulate your zest for the good life with something "fresh" to revitalize your rhythm.

Experience Asian hospitality at its finest as Dusit Hotel Nikko brings to you a new line-up of gastronomic offerings for January 2007.

The Café lets you discover culinary masterpieces to excite your discriminating tastes. The Café's dedicated chefs created various food offerings in their extensive line-up of buffet selections that is all yours for only P950++ per person. As a special privilege for the hotel's regular patrons, every group of five persons availing of lunch or dinner buffet shall receive one complimentary buffet from The Café.

Excite your taste buds this January at Benjarong with chef Tun's flavorful creations. Choose from five a la carte dishes offered from Jan. 17 to 31. Sample chef Tun's Gung Hom Sabai (deep-fried prawn wrapped in egg noodles) or the Makhae Yaw Yad Sai Tod (deep-fried egg plant stuffed with minced pork), among others.

The Japanese Weekend Buffet' has become a weekend ritual for gourmands as they visit Benkay to sample its wide array of choices. Sample the freshest sushi and salads to agemeno dishes of gindara and salmon, teppanyaki, tempuras, sukiyakis, selection of sobas and Japanese sweets for only P995++ per person. Kids ages 4 to 10 years old enjoy half the buffet rate. Benkay's weekend buffet is available from January to February 2007, every Saturday and Sunday, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Have a sampling of authentic Vietnamese cuisine at Thien Duong with chef Nguyen's Executive Set Menus for January 2007 specially created for busy executives. The six-course menu offerings consist of an appetizer, salad, soup, main course dishes, steamed rice, and dessert - a complete, fast, flavorful and healthy meal for the executive on the go.

True to Fiesta San Miguel's flair in reinventing classic Filipino favorites. For the month of January, the first "Resto-Brewery" in the country features 'Frinitson na Manok' (marinated fried chicken with four dipping sauces)- a new menu addition to compliment Fiesta San Miguel's fresh brewed beer and to satisfy your craving for a hefty lunch or dinner. This savory chicken dish is priced at P420++ (good for 2 to 3 persons).

Start your year at Dusit Hotel Nikko and feel Asian Hospitality at its best. For more information or reservations, call 867-3333.

Congo Grille opens branch in Pampanga

KAPAMPANGANS CAN now have a taste of Congo Grille's authentic Filipino cuisine as it recently opened its newest branch located at the SM City San Fernando in Pampanga.

The opening of the restaurant's 10th branch was part of its plan to expand to more outlets this year, to bring its unique kind of Filipino grilled dishes to Pinoys all over the country.

"With this new branch, we hope to share our one-of-a-kind taste to our Kapampangan diners. On top of our well-loved dishes, we will introduce new menu items that are sure to capture the discriminating taste of Kapampangan customers," said Rebecca Abadilla, Congo Grille San Fernando area manager.

Congo Grille has been known to revolutionize the grill restaurant concept by bringing outdoor style-cooking inside its air-conditioned establishment. The resto's San Fernando branch is no different, and customers can have their fill of Congo Grille's topsellers such as pork sisig, inihaw na pusit, bangus ala pobre, crispy tadyang, crispy pata, chicken fingers, tuna belly, lechon kawali, and Bacolod chicken, all inside a cool, comfortable setting.

The great food and eye-catching interior are complemented by Congo Grille San Fernando's friendly and efficient staff, ready to assist and serve customers all day, everyday.

Congo Grille San Fernando is located at the ground floor of the SM City San Fernando in Pampanga. For inquiries or reservations, call (045)963-9740 to 41.

G Hotel Manila by Waterfront backed by Filipino excellence

RECENTLY, G HOTEL MANILA by Waterfront opened its doors to the public to allow them to experience another Waterfront excellence in the heart of Manila. Two months preparation was all it takes for the corporate management group of Waterfront Philippines Inc to open another hotel concept in the country. G hotel is a great example of a boutique hotel, which has gathered a large following in developed countries. Boutique hotels differentiate themselves from other conventional hotels based on the smallness of the property, but focusing on the unique brand offering where, for G Hotel Manila it is the twenty-four hour personalized butler service.

G is for Great balance of style and substance that the property showcases in its very chic black and white lobby. Everybody was awed when they entered G during its launching last Nov. 17, 2006. G's lobby was adorned in black and white from the doors to Café Noir, the hotel's coffee shop, to the last step before they enter the elevators.

As the guests stepped out at the seventh floor where the main event was about to happen, they were welcomed by a dusk of gold in the Promenade, the hotel's ball room, with a grand view of the night sky overlooking the Manila Bay.

To date, Waterfront Philippines Inc is the country's largest Filipino-owned and managed first class hotel chain. It is the only hotel chain in the country that has presence in the key cities of the country. In Manila, it operates the Manila Pavilion Hotel and Casino and G Hotel Manila by Waterfront, in Cebu it operates the Waterfront Cebu City Hotel and Casino and the Waterfront Airport Hotel and Casino Mactan, while in Davao it is represented by the Waterfront Insular Hotel Davao.

For inquiries and reservations, please contact 525-0888, 687-0888 or e-mail msro@waterfronthotels.net, g.hotel@waterfronthotels.net.

People, Events & Products

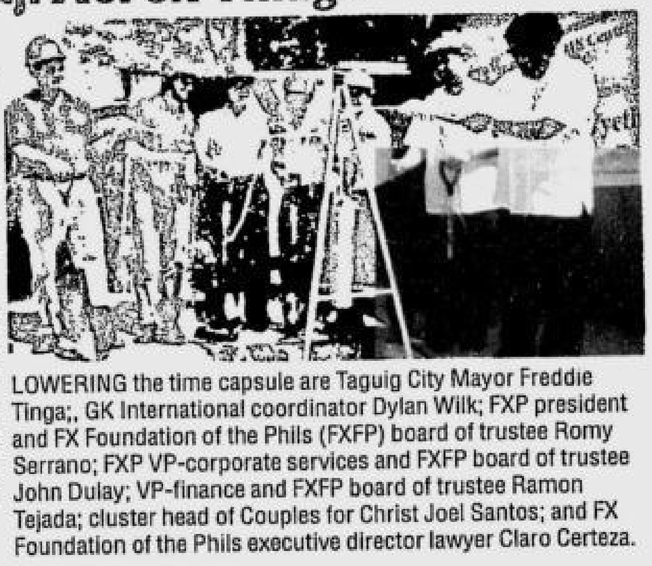
Fuji Xerox, Gawad Kalinga to put up Fuji Xerox Village

FUJI XEROX PHILIPPINES (FXP) THE LEADING document company is known as a market leader in terms of sales, profits and market coverage. This steadfast dedication towards excellence kept the company as one of the top corporations for many years. However, FXP's commitment to excellence doesn't end with its present accomplishments as a proud leader in the industry.

A community in Pinagsama Village in Western Bicutan will be converted into the Fuji Xerox Village. Some 58 families will have their homes renovated with FXP and its partners Poveda and Rotary Club of Makati West, shouldering the expenses and lending volunteers for the effort. FXP's initial commitment which was approved by the foundation board is to support the building of 20 houses, a total value of about 2 million.

Fuji Xerox has always been active in terms of extending assistance to various sectors of the society. In fact, an integral part of the corporation, the Fuji Xerox Foundation was established for this purpose. According to FXP president Romy Serrano, their executive director lawyer Claro Certeza introduced GK's vision of building houses building lives to FXP.

According to Serrano, the vision of what Pinagsama Village will be is a vision of what the whole Philippines can become if every slum area is transformed into a beautiful, peaceful community. He finished by saying "as we give hope to our brothers and sisters, the positive transformation of our communities, our society, our country follows as a natural consequence."



LOWERING the time capsule are Taguig City Mayor Freddie Tinga;, GK International coordinator Dylan Wilk; FXP president and FX Foundation of the Phils (FXFP) board of trustee Romy Serrano; FXP VP-corporate services and FXFP board of trustee John Dulay; VP-finance and FXFP board of trustee Ramon Tejada; cluster head of Couples for Christ Joel Santos; and FX Foundation of the Phils executive director lawyer Claro Certeza.